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## DOCTOR OF EDUCATION (EDD)

### An Autoethnographic Account of a British Educator's Experiences in the United States For-profit College Sector

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**AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC ACCOUNT OF A BRITISH  
EDUCATOR'S EXPERIENCES IN THE UNITED STATES  
FOR-PROFIT COLLEGE SECTOR**

Helen Mary Dunford

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Education

University of Bath  
Department of Education

October 2014

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### **Declaration of Authenticity**

I hereby declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education, contains no material previously published or written in any medium by another person, except where appropriate reference has been made.

**Signature:**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Helen Dunford". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

# **An Autoethnographic Account of a British Educator's Experiences in the United States For-Profit College Sector**

## **Abstract**

This research focuses on for-profit post-secondary education in the United States. Through autoethnography it seeks to examine the dissonance of function, belief and ethic in the role of a professional educator working in the proprietary industry. The autoethnographic data, based on personal memory data, email correspondence and interviews, show the challenges faced by staff and faculty in their efforts to meet revenue-linked performance targets set by corporate employers. The study uses grounded theory in conjunction with analytical autoethnography to identify the core concept of institutional pressure and to formulate a theory relating to the probable consequences of that pressure. While some staff and faculty are tempted to use questionable practices in order to meet required goals, others perceive they have no control over the circumstances that lead, for example, to the student attrition for which they are held responsible. The research describes how the autoethnographer and her co-workers were arguably recipients of negative feelings which were split and projected towards them by their employers and were unable to process or transform these negative feelings adequately. Some resigned from their positions and others were dismissed, but they departed taking this negativity with them in much the same way as a traditional scapegoat. As for-profit education continues to attract the attention of the media and regulatory bodies in the United States and similar colleges are established in other countries, this research has implications for those with expectations of education as a social good who find themselves required to work in a for-profit environment.



# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 The Research Question

As a researcher with experience of working in private colleges in the United States, I plan to examine, by means of autoethnography, both my role as an educator and the context in which I worked. For-profit post-secondary education in the United States is currently under intense scrutiny. The industry, which serves approximately 13 percent of students in higher education in America (United States Department of Education 2014), is receiving greater attention from government regulators than ever before. The Obama Administration has proposed legislation to limit access to federal student aid for private colleges that do not prepare students adequately for employment (U.S. Department of Education 2014) and media interest in the for-profit sector has increased.

For-profit colleges and universities, also known as proprietary schools, currently serve nearly three million students in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). They generate revenue by charging, on average, \$300.00 to \$500.00 per credit (90 to 100 quarter credits are typically required for a two-year associate degree and about 120 semester credits are required for a bachelor's degree). The majority of students receive Title IV funding, known as 'Financial Aid' (a low-interest loan from the federal government). It is permissible by law for a for-profit college to receive up to 90 percent of its income from Title IV funding. This access to government funding is controversial as federal taxes are, in effect, contributing to the profit margins of private owners. Managers at for-profit colleges are usually held responsible for budgets related to campus operations by their employers. To reach targets in growth and profitability, individual colleges must control student attrition and its impact on campus revenue. Meeting these internal standards is challenging, as the targets are generally high. In my experience a successful campus would hope to retain more than 95 percent of its population from one month to the next for 12 months of the year with staff held accountable for student withdrawals. The ability to retain students affects instructors' performance reviews and subsequent pay rises. In other words, student retention is a yardstick by which competent teaching is measured. I find this and other practices within for-profit education difficult to reconcile to my personal views as an educator.

With many autoethnographies, feeling marginalised is a major theme (Yang 2012; Tsang 2000). My autoethnography may reveal a connection between my rejection of certain practices within for-profit education and my personal sense of ‘otherness’. When I began this research I perceived that I was different from those around me. For example, I came from an academic management job in England where full-time meant nine to five, five days per week with five weeks holiday per year. I discovered that full-time in a management role in the United States meant eight till five minimum, frequent unpaid overtime (often finishing after nine o’clock at night), weekend work and only two weeks holiday. I admit that I never fully reconciled myself to these conditions while those around me accepted them. Not only did my American co-workers appear inured to these circumstances, they did not harbour the resentment of someone who, like me, saw working longer hours as an imposition.

I am an educator of British origin who has spent more than 30 years working as a teacher, teacher trainer and academic administrator. I worked in for-profit education in the United States for ten years. During this time I observed practices that made me feel uncomfortable because they appeared to put corporate objectives before student needs. I eventually left my job because I felt my position had become untenable. Working as a British educator in an unfamiliar environment gave me a different perspective from that of my American colleagues. I am interested in knowing whether my sense of being ‘othered’ is justified and to what extent I was scapegoated by the corporation for which I worked. If I am correct in perceiving that I was treated as ‘the other’ and/or scapegoated because of my inability to process negativity – a failure which eventually prompted me to leave my job – what might this tell us about for-profit education? In this study I will interweave autoethnographic data into an examination of how working in for-profit education affected me as an individual and consider what my experiences might imply for private post-secondary education. My initial research question is therefore:

*What do my experiences as a British Educator in the United States reveal about for-profit post-secondary education and the extent to which phenomena such as ‘othering’ and scapegoating occur?*

## **1.2 The Author's First Experience of Proprietary Education**

On arriving in the United States 18 years ago, I was surprised at the prevalence of for-profit colleges and shocked at the high tuition fees. It cost over \$40,000.00 to qualify for an entry-level position such as a medical assistant in a doctor's office. At my place of work I seemed to be alone in thinking that \$40,000 was a high price to pay for a \$12.00 per hour job. An American colleague explained, '*We just expect to pay for our education here*'. My unfamiliarity with these schools set me apart and made me feel 'othered'. I admit to accepting a full-time job within this industry without fully understanding how schools of this kind operated. In truth, I had no idea what to expect and when I arrived for my first day as Associate Academic Dean of a vocational school, I found things to be startlingly different from what I had anticipated:

### **Data Set 1: My First Day as Associate Dean**

**Written March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2012, recounting the events of January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2002**

*I was working as a sales associate in a kitchen supply store and a part-time EFL instructor in a community college and I needed a full-time job. Although my two jobs were relatively stress free and enjoyable, I wasn't making enough to pay the bills and had no health insurance (a major concern in the United States). My only option was to find a position with 'benefits'. When I saw an advertisement in the paper for an Associate Dean at a local college, I thought I had found the ideal opportunity. I was under the misapprehension that this college taught EFL – a subject in which I had considerable expertise. It was only after I had persuaded the Dean to meet with me for an informational interview that I realised I was wrong. I did not admit my error, of course. Instead, I attempted to say all the right things to the (extremely nice) woman who had agreed to meet with me and made sure I picked up a college catalogue on my way out so I could actually study the programmes they offered in the hope that I would be invited back for a formal interview.*

*Three weeks later I received a call asking me to meet with the College President. This time, I made sure I knew about the programmes. The college offered associate degrees (two-year degrees) in subjects such as accounting and medical assisting. It seemed similar to the technical college in Britain where I had taken my A-levels. This kind of college was very different from where I had been working but I felt as if I knew enough about education, adult learners and managing faculty to be able to do the job. It seems I made a*

*good account of myself with the College President because I was invited back a few days later for a telephone interview with the Regional Retention Manager. I wasn't entirely sure what 'retention' meant but assumed it had something to do with not losing students, so I showed up armed with strategies for monitoring the quality of classroom instruction and obviously hit some of the right notes.*

*The next day I received a job offer and after some negotiation of salary and schedule, I accepted. Nothing could have prepared me for my first day at work. I was invited to sit in the Dean's office (my new boss) and observe as she met with students who were beginning the quarter on academic suspension. I encountered a student body that was unlike any I had previously worked with. No doubt there were many among the 700 or so population who were doing fine, both economically and academically. Those would be the ones I never saw. However, those who came up to the 5<sup>th</sup> floor to 'see the Deans' were struggling, not only in their classes but also invariably in their lives. When they came to fill out their academic appeals, many of them could barely write a coherent sentence. They dressed, not in the casual style of students, but in the worn, grubby attire of those who had no other clothes to wear and certainly no access to a washing machine. When it came to explaining why they had failed so many courses, the reasons were varied but related to challenges I had never had to face in my life: incarceration, serious illness with no access to medical care, homelessness ('I'm living in my car' was a common remark), drug abuse and spousal abuse. When it came to leave, they often asked for bus fare because they had no way of getting home.*

*As I sat in my supervisor's office watching and listening to a succession of students, each one with an equally troubling account of how he/she was suffering extreme hardship, I worked hard to conceal my surprise. The Dean was patient with all the students, appeared totally unsurprised by any of the catastrophes they related to her and focused on what she could actually do – within the college's regulations – to help them get back on track with their studies. At the end of the day she joked with me about whether I would be coming back the next day after what I had witnessed. I tried to remain phlegmatic (in the best 'British' tradition) but she knew I was a little shocked.*

*That day, I had arrived thinking that after many years of EFL teaching and training, I was finally getting to work in a 'real college'. I left feeling as though for the first time in my*

*life, after so many years of working with the relatively privileged, I finally knew what poverty looked like.*

The above passage introduces the theme of ‘otherness’. From day one I do not feel part of the educational community I am about to join. I do not understand what kind of college it is, I am unfamiliar with the concept of student retention and I have never worked with a population that has the characteristics I identify during my initial encounters with students. Was I truly ‘othered’ or are all new employees similarly surprised when they join the proprietary industry? Struthers (2012) suggests that autoethnography provides a means to “*legitimise personal experience as a knowledge source*” (p. 20). I therefore plan to use data relating to my experiences in for-profit education as a way of interpreting the dissonance of function, belief and ethic in my work as an educator. Was this caused by ‘othering’ or did my colleagues experience a similar misalignment of required duties with their views of education and perceptions of right and wrong?

The major focus of my role as Academic Dean was to retain as many students as possible. I tried for nine years to meet this challenge. Sometimes, I was successful but over the years the targets were increased and the challenge became more difficult. I eventually became demoralised and started to manifest what my doctor diagnosed as the effects of work-based stress. She referred me to a psychologist for counselling who listened carefully to my story and told me that in her view the cure lay in leaving my job. My doctor explained that the physical symptoms I was displaying, which appeared to be linked to work, were potentially dangerous. I believe it was the constant pressure to meet ever-increasing targets coupled with doubts about the morality of certain business practices, together with growing concerns about my health that led me to resign from my position.

Following my resignation I chose to use autoethnography as a way of investigating the circumstances of my departure, with a view to making an original contribution to knowledge related to the proprietary industry. Within three months, I found a new job, again in the private sector. I was to fulfill a similar role but at university level with students taking bachelor’s and master’s degrees in professional fields such as business and accounting. I assumed that working on a smaller campus with students at this higher level would be less daunting and present fewer challenges. Unfortunately, this was not to be the

case. While the students had fewer issues of a socioeconomic nature, working on a smaller campus meant being expected to fulfill a wide variety of different functions that would not normally fall under the remit of a dean. Multi-tasking led to working long, grueling days and the sensation of being overwhelmed. In addition I observed colleagues engaging in practices that in my opinion, did not appear to be in the best interests of the students. Ironically it was my previous experience in the for-profit industry that attracted my new employer to me. I truly did have a better understanding of how for-profit education worked than candidates from the public sector. This did not, however, mean that I felt more comfortable in this new position than I had in my previous job. I remained there for seven months before realizing that, yet again, this was not a good situation for me. Once more, I felt as though my inability to reconcile my personal views of education and ethical practice to the requirements of my role set me apart from others in my professional environment. My research will investigate the extent to which my perception is justified.

### **1.3 The Chapters**

This research enquiry begins with a review of the literature related to proprietary education in the United States which finds that there is insufficient knowledge regarding how staff and faculty respond to working in a for-profit environment. The review examines the history and growth of the industry and its role in contemporary American society. It will show how for-profit education has been integral to the development of vocational training in the United States. The literature will also address how for-profit educators are regarded with suspicion by their non-profit counterparts despite claims that they provide opportunities for students whose needs are not adequately served by the public sector. The review will describe how, owing to concerns related to certain practices, the proprietary industry has come under increasing scrutiny from government entities in the past decade resulting in a number of highly publicised lawsuits and government audits.

The literature review will focus on two other critical topics, 'othering' and scapegoating. An understanding of both concepts is required to determine whether they contributed to an inability to function effectively. The morality of commercial markets within education will also be considered as, for some, education is a public good, which should be provided as a service, while for others, the profit motive is justifiable. For-profit proponents believe that education as a marketable commodity is ultimately reconcilable to the needs of students who benefit from a degree of accountability not found in the public sector.

A chapter defending the choice of methodology and discussing the methods used for data collection and analysis follows the literature review. This chapter posits that analytical autoethnography is more suitable for current purposes than an evocative approach while arguing that elements of both could be present in the study without detracting from its effectiveness. Throughout the study, autoethnographic writing is inserted as interstices between sections in order to orientate the reader, explain the context and create a chronology of events.

Practical and ethical challenges related to the collection and interpretation of data, and the research setting and participants are also examined. In addition, the autoethnographer's dual, and potentially conflicting role of subject and researcher, which calls for heightened reflexivity, is discussed. Ontological and epistemological positions are stated together with proposed criteria for evaluating the validity and reliability of the findings.

In Chapter 4 the strategies used for coding data are explained and findings are discussed, while Chapter 5 includes a presentation of theory based on emergent themes. Both the discussion and theory represent a major shift in the researcher's position, from one who initially sees herself as 'othered' within her working environment, to one who recognises a commonality of experience with her co-workers in terms of the perceived effects of institutional pressure and the potential for scapegoating. The final chapter summarises conclusions and suggests ways in which insights derived from the study might impact future practice or stimulate future research.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 For-Profit Post-Secondary Education in the United States

For-profit colleges and universities form what is known as the ‘proprietary sector’ in post-secondary education in the United States. These establishments have private ownership or proprietors (hence ‘proprietary’). Some are owned by corporations and have publicly traded stock. Others are small, privately owned schools. Institutions that offer diplomas and two-year associate degrees are often referred to as ‘career colleges’ or ‘vocational schools’ (the words ‘school’ and ‘college’ are generally used interchangeably) while those offering bachelor’s degrees or higher may describe themselves as universities. About 2,000 of these schools are eligible to receive federal student aid giving students access to subsidised government loans for tuition fees (Kutz 2010). There is no direct equivalent of the proprietary system in Britain. As of July 2010, there were 14 for-profit educational corporations in the United States worth more than \$26 billion (Kutz 2010).

##### 2.1.1 *The History of Proprietary Education in the United States.*

The history of for-profit education is relatively well documented (Lee and Merisotis 1990; Honick 1995; Seyboldt 1925). Schools run as private businesses existed in the United States as early as the seventeenth century during what was known as the colonial era (Lee and Merisotis 1990). These small, often one-person operations, offered courses in navigation, accounting, and practical work-related skills not taught by public colleges of the period. Thus:

*“the needs of business and of students eager to enter the workforce have always driven proprietary school behaviour.”* (Honick 1995, p. 27)

A growing number of small schools led to the emergence of a business college alliance in the nineteenth century and the beginnings of a proprietary sector (Honick 1995). Bryant and Stratton, who founded their first college in 1853 and used it as a model for a number of franchises in the northeast of the country, started the first recognised proprietary chain. At the beginning of the twentieth century, criticism of for-profit schools by advocates of public education led the sector to form its own regulatory and lobbying bodies and finally,



from the mid-twentieth century onwards, proprietary schools were allowed to participate in federal grant and loan programs alongside their public counterparts (Honick 1995). This historical perspective suggests that private sector education was created to address a need for skills not met by public schools. It also traces the origins of contemporary tensions between the public and private sectors back to the early twentieth century and the beginnings of what was to become a powerful pro-proprietary lobby. However, despite providing pertinent information regarding the history of the industry, Lee and Merisotis (1990), Honick (1995) and Seyboldt (1925) do not address the conditions of employment or opinions of campus administrators and faculty. Indeed, there is little consideration of any ethical or moral issues related to the marketing of education to a fee-paying public.

Early proprietors used advertising to compete for student enrolments in a similar way to schools of today (Seyboldt 1925). Although limited to (non-electronic) print media they promoted their products by emphasizing the advantages of intensive vocational training and subsequent employment. Seyboldt (1925) cites a number of early advertisements in newspapers including a public notice placed by a builder, Thomas Nevell in 1771. Nevell claims he can train “*a person of common capacity*” in “*two months at most*” to become a skilled carpenter (p. 44). His promise of a quick return on an investment in education is remarkably similar to those made by proprietary institutions today. For example, the website of Carrington College, a well-known chain of career schools owned by DeVry Inc. says of its programmes:

*“You’ll notice that many of them can be completed in less than a year – which means you can start making those dreams of success a reality pretty quickly...”* (Carrington College 2014)

Although it is possible to trace the roots of the modern proprietary industry back to colonial times, the for-profit sector, as we know it today, underwent its most rapid expansion during the twentieth century. The most notable development occurred in 1944 after the passing of the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act (Honick 1995). The act, popularly known as the GI Bill (the letters GI standing for “Government Issue”) afforded returning servicemen the opportunity to seek education and training, at the government’s expense, from an approved list of schools including a number of for-profits. This funding not only represented the first federal subsidy of any kind for proprietary schools but also

legitimised these institutions in the eyes of the consumer. The impact of the GI Bill in terms of promoting the industry is evident (Honick 1995; Lee and Merisotis 1990). Nevertheless, as we shall see in Section 2.1.6, the proactive recruitment of ex-military personnel under the bill's provisions has led to adverse criticism.

### *2.1.2 The Growth of the Proprietary Sector in the Modern Era*

Literature relating to the growth of the proprietary industry in the United States is important to this study because it provides insight into the significant role for-profit schools play in contemporary higher education. Changes in federal policy such as the aforementioned GI Bill have enabled students at for-profit schools to benefit from government assistance. The 1972 Amendments to the Higher Education Act provided “*full and equal participation with traditional higher education students*” (Lee and Merisotis 1990, p. 1). These amendments included a definition of what constituted an educational institution:

*“any public or private preschool, elementary, or secondary school, or any institution of vocational, professional, or higher education...”* (U.S. Department of Labor 1972, Section 1681, (9) (c))

The most significant implication of these changes was the increased access to Federal Student Aid (otherwise known as ‘Financial Aid’) for proprietary school students. According to the U.S. Department of Education Federal Student Aid website, students can currently borrow up to \$57,000.00 in subsidised and unsubsidised low-interest loans from the government to pay for undergraduate studies. The availability of Financial Aid led to a for-profit surge in the 1970s and 1980s (Honick 1995) that continued into the 1990s and saw a number of large, multi-campus corporations enter the market. The “*most dominant force in this new arena*” is the University of Phoenix, founded in 1976 (Cronin and Bachorz 2006, p. 12). Based on 2006 enrolment figures it was one of the ten largest universities in the world. However, its rise is not solely attributable to participation in federal aid programs. Purportedly, “*four mega-trends...fuel the success of Phoenix and other entrepreneurial colleges*” including the worldwide ‘*massification*’ of higher education, the increased demand for technologically proficient graduates, “*death of distance*”, whereby many more students choose to study online, and finally the “*magnetic lure of billions*” that is, the profit-motive itself (Cronin and Bachorz 2006, p. 12).

A report for the Education Commission of the States (Kelly 2001) documents a sharp increase in for-profit institutions. The report indicates a 78 percent growth in the number of for-profit two-year degree granting institutions and an impressive 266 percent growth in four-year for-profit colleges over a ten-year period starting in 1989. That the report should greet this increase with an apparent sense of awe is not surprising given that the Education Commission is sponsored by a number of corporations including a leading purveyor of proprietary education, Corinthian Colleges. Indeed much of the literature emphasises benefits to the investor over and above benefits to the student. Blumenstyk (2003) for example, describes for-profit education as one of the few business sectors that private-equity funds can rely on to grow, claiming that fund managers “*are tripping over each other to get a foothold in the industry*” (p. 1).

Rather than focus on revenue, Lips (2000) lauds the expansion of proprietary education as a response to business demands for an educated workforce and consumer demands for more educational options. In her nevertheless markedly pro-proprietary survey, she advocates tax cuts for the private sector in order to “*loosen the government’s monopoly on education*” (p. 4). She contends that a customer-driven system will offer a wider range of services and remove barriers, allegedly created by the government, which prevent students from accessing higher education. She depicts multi-state, multi-campus corporate owners (“*Edupreneurs*”) as educational crusaders who are “*making post-secondary education more convenient and affordable*” (p. 1). She sees the industry as flexible, worker-friendly and accountable, measuring its success in job placement rates while traditional post-secondary institutions are “*failing to respond sufficiently to the growing demand for adult education*” (p. 11). She suggests that the only way to address a dearth of qualified candidates in critical sectors of the economy (such as high-tech industries) is to promote choice for educational vendors and consumers alike. There is evidence to support Lips’ argument that proprietary schools makes themselves relevant by being convenient, and accountable in terms of preparing graduates for the workplace (see 2.1.3. below) though the Obama Administration’s proposals for gainful employment legislation would suggest otherwise (U.S. Department of Education 2014).

In summary, this section described the increase in the number of for-profit colleges in the United States over the past 70 years starting with the introduction of the GI Bill in 1944. This expansion continued in 1972 when a change to the government’s definition of what

constituted an educational institution gave proprietary school students access to low interest government loans to pay for tuition. Industry growth was accompanied by increased interest from investors. Although some see the expanding for-profit market as a response to consumer needs (Lips 2000) the Obama Administration has proposed gainful employment legislation (U.S. Department of Education 2014) in order to regulate the industry's operations. The focus on investment opportunity suggests there is an emphasis in the literature on 'for-profit' rather than 'education'.

### *2.1.3 The Conflict Between Serving Society and Serving Investors*

Questions have arisen regarding whether the proprietary industry serves investors' needs over and above the needs of students and society (Swenson 1998). Some believe the industry has simply responded to an increased demand for higher education that the public system cannot satisfy (Cronin and Bachorz 2006). One could claim that, in filling this void, the proprietary industry serves society as a whole. California governors Ronald Reagan and Arnold Schwarzenegger declined to finance dormitories for new state universities thus forcing students to choose alternative arrangements such as for-profit commuter campuses (Cronin and Bachorz 2006) while according to Davis and Botkin (1994):

*"Business, more than government, is instituting the changes in education that are required for the emerging knowledge-based economy. School systems, public and private are lagging behind the transformation in learning that is evolving outside them in the private sector."* (p. 170)

In other words, much of the literature applauds the industry for offering access to education to an otherwise underserved population.

Lips (2000) advocates opening education *"to the forces of competition"* (p. 18) in order to allow *"edupreneurs"* to *"to prepare students to participate effectively in the new economy"* (p. 19). She cites a survey of Fortune 500 CEOs, of whom 70 percent lament the dearth of adequately trained candidates for skilled positions, and suggests that proprietary schools can address this deficiency more effectively than the public sector. Former Massachusetts state governor (William F. Weld) stated that they *"identify when there has to be a new skill on the shop floor, and they provide it"* (Blumenstyk 2003, p. 3).

Indeed, Blumenstyk (2003) unashamedly lauds corporate education as an ideal opportunity for private-equity funds because the industry can reconcile the needs of both investors and employers:

*“With no-frills campuses and highly structured curriculums, the career-college companies appeal to investors because they can produce skilled graduates and return a healthy profit at the same time. Profit margins of at least 20 percent are typical in the industry.”* (p. 3)

Ironically, beneficiaries of this boom include traditional, non-profit colleges (Blumenstyk 2003) who are significant, if passive, investors in for-profit education. Among these investors are well-known universities such as Harvard, Johns Hopkins and Dartmouth College. Given the tension that exists between the public and the private sectors in post-secondary education (a topic addressed later in this chapter) it seems somewhat hypocritical that prestigious private institutions would choose to profit from the financial success of their proprietary competitors.

Thus far I have discussed ways in which proprietary schools serve the interests of society in general, and employers and investors in particular, but do they address the needs of the students? According to U.S. Department of Education figures published in March 2014, 13 percent of the higher education population of the United States (2,860,000 of an estimated total of 22,000,000) attends for-profit institutions. Perceptions of this demographic range from low-income, vulnerable and easily exploited victims of ‘hard-sell’ enrolment tactics (Armour and Zibel 2014) to highly savvy, demanding customers comparison shopping for the most affordable and convenient service (Lips 2000). As for-profit colleges offer a wide variety of programmes, it is likely that both extremes exist, with the lower income students drawn to shorter programmes promising entry-level professional employment, and the higher end customers seeking enhanced skills that will lead to promotion. Lips (2000) describes the latter, a mature population taking advantage of current technologies to learn via distance education. These students expect a “*no-nonsense and customer oriented*” education model (p. 11). Chung (2004) however, citing data gathered by the National Center for Education Statistics, describes the population specifically targeted by the lower end vocational schools as:

*“Groups traditionally under-represented in higher education: students from low-income families and from families with low human capital, minority students, and non-traditional students.” (p. 2)*

Chung’s demographic is 66.5 percent female and racially diverse (20 percent African American and 23.4 percent Hispanic). Almost three quarters do not have financial support from their parents. Around 45 percent have an annual income of less than \$20,000 per year and 27 percent have an income of less than \$10,000 per year which puts almost half of all proprietary students below the national poverty line by today’s standards (U.S. Department of Health and Human services, 2014). Two thirds delay college entrance after high school and 45 percent have dependents. Finally, it seems that in most cases, students’ parents did not complete any kind of post-secondary education. More recent Department of Education statistics (cited by Mago and Peterson 2012) are very similar in terms of the proportion of independent students and minorities but in addition they show that 39 percent of students in for-profit colleges need to work full-time while studying. These statistics suggest that many students in post-secondary for-profit education are financially vulnerable.

Some commentators are concerned that for-profit establishments regards students as customers purchasing a commodity rather than citizens receiving a service provided for the common good (Tilak 2008; Oureshi, Gross and Desai 2014). Students themselves may wish to be treated as such with the attendant rights and privileges:

*“I want terrific service. I want convenience. I want quality control. Give me classes 24 hours a day, and give me in-class parking if possible.” (McLenney 1998, p. 6)*

Those in traditional higher education may be reluctant to view students as customers because *“until fairly recently, they never had to”* (Swenson 1998, p. 37). It is perhaps this notion of students as customers that puts proprietary education at odds with the public sector.

The above section describes an increase in the demand for college places which the public sector is unable to satisfy, thus prompting students to turn to for-profit institutions for the

education required to obtain employment. The literature commends private career colleges for providing training in the skills required for specific professions. Many of the students who enrol in programmes at for-profit colleges are socially and financially vulnerable, while others are discerning and demanding customers who expect a high standard of service. The suggestion that education is regarded as a commodity for purchase rather than a public service raises ethical concerns. The majority of authors cited in this section prefer to document the industry's growth rather than discuss its implications in moral and ethical terms, hence a need for the current research. There is a dearth of scholarship addressing how marketing a product such as education at a relatively high price to low income students could present an ethical dilemma to educators. This study seeks to open the debate.

#### *2.1.4 Proprietary Education and the Public Sector*

A focus on vocational skills designed to enhance employment prospects distinguishes for-profit institutions from public institutions. Folkman Schulz (2000) describes the mission of proprietary schools as providing “*adults with job training that will enable them to enter the workplace quickly*” (p. 1). Community colleges, however, offer a wide range of courses (such as community education classes) that are not vocational in nature (Bailey, Badway and Gumport 2003). Similarly, students at public colleges still take degrees in subjects such as liberal arts, which though designed to increase one's ability to think critically, do not prepare individuals for specific professions (National Education Association 2004). Proprietary schools specialise in job training for aspiring auto mechanics, massage therapists, police officers, pharmacy technicians, accountants, paralegals and more. Furthermore owing to budget restraints, community colleges are often unable to accommodate large numbers of applicants for popular programmes such as practical nursing whereas for-profit establishments actively compete for enrolments and will organise extra classes at short notice rather than turn customers away. Snider (2010) claims that as a result of state budget cuts:

*“Oversubscribed classes and reduced offerings have led some community college students to drop out or switch to for-profit institutions, where tuition is often significantly higher and program quality is uneven.”* (p. 1)

Tuition costs are indeed higher at for-profit colleges. Proprietary schools charge an average of \$14,174 annually whereas community colleges cost around \$2,500 per annum. However, students still choose the more expensive option because “*they can take the classes they need quickly and get on with their lives*” (Wilson 2010, p. 7). By the end of the 1990s, 28 percent of all two-year degree granting institutions were for-profits. (Bailey, Badway and Gumport 2003) while at bachelor’s level and above, the University of Phoenix increased its total enrolment from 25,100 in 1995 to 455,600 in 2010 (Wilson 2010). Lips (2000) clearly feels that drawing on tuition, rather than state governments, as a primary source of revenue leads to an enhanced customer orientated approach. She claims that for-profits are more accountable and “*typically measure results in terms of student performance*” (p. 5) implying that proprietary graduates are more employable.

Not everyone agrees however when it comes to measuring student success in terms of graduate placement. Indeed, one of the major criticisms leveled at the proprietary industry is that relatively expensive programmes, which purportedly train students for professional careers, do not actually lead to employment. This apparent disconnect between post-secondary study and subsequent employment is the primary focus of recent governmental scrutiny.

#### *2.1.5 Retention*

The term ‘student retention’ refers to the number of students who remain actively enrolled in their programmes at any given time, whereas ‘completion’ means the number who actually graduate from a programme. The word ‘persistence’ is often used in conjunction with ‘retention’, for example, students who ‘persist’ are ‘retained’.

There is evidence to suggest that a higher percentage of students complete their programmes in proprietary schools than in the public sector. Lee and Merisotis (1990) and Wilson (2010) cite a 60 percent graduation rate from for-profit schools. It seems however, that while this percentage has remained stable, the number of students graduating from community colleges has decreased over the same 17-year period. In 1990 “*just over 40 percent*” of community college students graduated (Lee and Merisotis, p. 3) whereas by 2007, that number had dropped to 26 percent (Wilson 2010).



There could be various explanations for the disparity between public and private institutions but one of the more obvious reasons would be a higher retention rate in for-profit schools attributable to greater individual support. The University of Phoenix, for example monitors attendance:

*“They tell online students they are expected to log on four times a week. If they don’t, someone from Phoenix phones them to see what’s wrong and what help they need. Most colleges do not check in with students until mid-semester warning time.”* (Cronin and Bachorz 2006, p. 14)

Folkman Schulz (2000) observed similar support strategies at a massage therapy training school:

*“Teachers watched for students with problems from the first day of class and conferred with the director of operations on how to intervene.”* (p. 128)

This proactive response to student absences is in keeping with Seidman’s retention formula (2005):

*“Ret = Early id + (E + In + C) iv that is, Retention = Early identification + (Early + Intensive + Continuous) intervention.”* (cited in Seidman 2012, p. 267)

Seidman (2012) claims that his formula applies to all students regardless of age, economic status, cultural background or type of school. Therefore, given the obvious correlation between retention and completion, if proprietary schools graduate students at a higher rate, it might be fair to suggest that the for-profits implement the Seidman formula (or similar retention strategies) more systematically. Students who are retained continue to pay tuition, which in turn generates revenue for the school, its owners and shareholders. This could be construed as a good example of students’ needs being reconciled to business interests. If this concerted effort to retain students leads to favourable outcomes, why do those in public education, government entities and the students themselves appear to find it so troubling? If, as the evidence suggests, students complete at a higher rate and are retained more successfully in for-profit schools, why then, do proprietaries receive such adverse criticism from the public sector? The answer lies in two major issues arising from this apparently positive scenario. The first relates to holding staff and faculty accountable for

student attrition and the second concerns the connection between graduation and gainful employment.

Seidman (2012) argues that early and continuous intervention in the case of struggling students is the key to retention. However, making staff and faculty ultimately responsible for student attrition and expecting them to retain almost all students regardless of individual circumstances, is at variance with other retention theories, the best known of which is Tinto's Theory of Academic Integration (Tinto 1987, 1993). Tinto (1993) argues that integrating students into a campus community is the most effective way of keeping them in school. He and other retention experts (Astin 1984; Bean 1990; and Seidman 2005 and 2012) believe an entire campus should participate in retaining students. In practice, the staff members who have the most frequent contact with students (the teachers) shoulder most of this burden. A danger inherent in holding faculty accountable for retention is that perceiving all student losses as failures could ultimately create a culture of blame and a sense of hopelessness leading to inferior performance:

*“When an administration pressures faculty to retain students without admitting that the task may not be possible, already discouraged, overworked, and underpaid teachers have even less incentive to improve the teaching we have been hired to do.”* (Arnold 2000, p. 137)

However, the assumption that retention rates are reliable indicators of educational quality is questionable:

*“Tertiary education providers cannot control all or even most of the factors that lead to successful completion, retention and graduate experience.”* (Cauchi and Calder 2004, p. 2)

Campus staff might perceive that most student attrition cannot be prevented even with early and continuous intervention. If, however, a corporation assumes the opposite, tension is likely to develop in the relationship between proprietary owners and their employees. If faculty success is measured in retention percentages, teachers might feel as though they are working under unreasonable duress, particularly as many students leave owing to external factors such as ill health and poverty. The literature on this subject

supports the faculty view (Payne 2005; Serra Hagedorn, Perrakis and Maxwell 2007). A perception of lack of control can lead to a feeling of despondency which Arnold (2000) herself an instructor, conveys effectively, citing a passage from Heller's *Catch-22* in which Snowden is dying from serious injuries:

*"Whenever I take part in a discussion of student retention, I have the feeling that, like Yossarian, we are bandaging the leg wound while the patient's guts are pouring out all over the floor."* (p. 131)

#### 2.1.6 Gainful Employment

Graduate employment is a contentious issue (Wilson 2010). Some claim that for-profits persist because they meet the needs of students transitioning from college to work (Folkman Schulz 2000; Lips 2000). However the United States Department of Education is questioning employment statistics. According to the Education Secretary Arne Duncan:

*"Higher education should open up doors of opportunity, but students in these low-performing (career college) programs often end up worse off than before they enrolled: saddled by debt and with few – if any – options for a career."* (U.S. Department of Education 2014)

This assertion is based, not on actual employment data, but rather on the limited earning potential of proprietary school graduates. It seems 72 percent of those emerging from vocational programmes earn less on average than high school dropouts (U.S. Department of Education 2014). The Obama Administration plans to *"protect Americans from predatory, poor-performing career colleges"* (U.S. Department of Education 2014). Per government data, the 13 percent of students in higher education who are enrolled in for-profit schools, actually receive a disproportionate 31 percent of all student loans and are responsible for nearly half of all loan defaults (U.S. Department of Education 2014). The average loan debt of students graduating with two-year associate degrees from for-profit schools is currently \$23,590, while the majority of their counterparts in community colleges do not take out any loans at all, largely owing to the lower cost of tuition.

These government concerns suggest that the profit motive driving proprietary colleges could be at odds with the needs of the students. Wilson (2010) claims that *"there are*

*plenty of horror stories about career-college students ... who leave with large student-loan bills and then fail to get jobs”* (p. 7) and anecdotal evidence abounds, as in, for example the “*tragic*” story of “*Jaqueta*” related by Rust (2014):

*“Hoping to escape from a future of dead-end jobs, she enrolled in a two-year associate’s program at Everest University Online. But a year later, she has failed or dropped out of six courses at two different schools. She has never earned a single credit hour... she still cannot find a ‘salary job’. But now she has thousands of dollars in outstanding federal student loans. And she’s not the only one.”* (p. 1)

Rust’s somewhat emotive recounting of “*Inside a for-profit college nightmare*” (p. 1) and his claim that “*Some schools feast on federal aid and don’t care if the student can’t repay it*” is typical of current media coverage. This criticism, coupled with the aforementioned government scrutiny suggests that there are a number of ethical concerns related to the proprietary industry. However, tabloid-style reports do not equate to scholarly investigation. My hope therefore, is that my research partially addresses this deficiency.

#### *2.1.7 Ethical Concerns*

Concerns related to the ethos and operations of proprietary schools have been expressed by a number of commentators, including state and federal regulators, educational researchers and journalists (Kutz 2010; National Education Association 2004; Oureshi, Gross and Desai 2014; U.S. Department of Education 2014; Wilson 2010). These concerns include the suitability of owners, the appropriateness of selling education for profit and the nature of certain revenue-related campus practices.

Private career schools have developed separately from traditional institutions and are often owned by corporations with (collective) business acumen rather than educational experience (Lee and Merisotis 1990). However, reactions go beyond reservations about ownership. For example, the President of the American Association of University Professors likens for-profit schools to an alien life form (the “*blob*”) that consumed everything in its path in a 1958 science fiction movie:

*“The blob would shimmer and then be half as big as before ... you’d turn your attention away and look back and suddenly, it’s blocking most of the sun.”*

(Nelson, interviewed by Wilson 2010, p. 2)

Further criticism comes from Persell and Wenglinisky (2004) who purport that graduates of proprietary schools are unprepared for civic engagement because of the narrow, skills-based focus of programmes, in contrast to the wider range of general education requirements in traditional colleges. They even suggest that as a consequence *“the democratic life of the United States suffers”* (p. 353). Perhaps this righteous indignation should be tempered by the realization that the majority of students in vocational programmes are focused on qualifying quickly in order to make a living wage. Presumably good citizenship will ensue once graduates are gainfully employed and able to make a contribution to society.

Nevertheless, there are sufficient concerns regarding practices within the sector to have prompted at least a dozen state attorneys general to scrutinise the operations of for-profit chains (*The Chronicle of Higher Education* 2014). A recent investigation has led to a lawsuit, filed by the state of California, against Corinthian Colleges who, as of 2013 had 81,000 students enrolled nationwide. The CCI Corporation that owns Corinthian Colleges was accused of:

*“misrepresenting job placement rates, false advertising and other deceptive practices to lure low-income residents to take out student loans to attend its schools.”* (*The Oregonian* 2013)

California Attorney General Kamala Harris called a press conference at which she displayed training materials taken from a CCI internal document describing the target demographic of Corinthian Colleges as:

*“Isolated, impatient individuals with low self-esteem, who have few people in their lives who care about them and who are stuck and unable to see and plan well for the future.”* (*The Oregonian* 2013)

Ms. Harris suggested that prospective students were targeted because they were rendered vulnerable by the above characteristics and therefore susceptible to exploitation. However, as one who worked in proprietary education for ten years, my view is that the training materials should not necessarily be interpreted as an invitation to exploit the vulnerable for the purposes of predatory recruiting. Indeed, I have seen socio-demographic data of this nature presented during training sessions to help staff understand the challenges often faced by low-income students. Rather than highlighting weaknesses for the purposes of exploitation, this kind of material emphasises the extent to which proprietary school students need the support of campus staff in order to succeed. This interpretation would be in keeping with Seidman's aforementioned retention formula (2005) and Payne's framework for understanding poverty (2005). The Seidman formula requires faculty members to identify problems early and react accordingly. Payne proposes: *"Resources of students ... should be analyzed before dispensing advice or seeking solutions ..."* (p. 25). In other words, teachers who are often middle class, do not necessarily understand the life challenges faced by proprietary school students, many of whom live in poverty, and therefore training of the sort that raises awareness is critical. However, where the desire to make a profit is a primary objective, is there a concern that undue pressure might be applied to staff to put the business needs of a corporation before the academic needs of the student body?

Subsequent to the state of California lawsuit, the federal government also took action against Corinthian Colleges for failure to respond to repeated requests for required student data. Restricted access to federal Financial Aid caused the company to close 12 of its schools and put the remaining 85 campuses up for sale (U.S. Department of Education 2014). However, Corinthian Colleges is not the only for-profit corporation with regulatory issues. In 2010, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (G.A.O.) conducted an investigation into for-profit campuses. The department responsible for Forensic Audits and Special Investigations subjected fifteen schools to undercover testing and reported the outcomes to the U.S. Senate. Although some schools were found to be dispensing accurate information, the findings, in general were alarming:

*"Our covert testing at 15 for-profit colleges found that four colleges encouraged fraudulent practices, such as encouraging students to submit false information about their financial status. In addition all 15 colleges made some type of*

*deceptive or otherwise questionable statement to undercover applicants, such as misrepresenting the applicant's likely salary after graduation.” (Kutz 2010, p. 7)*

Although I am not entirely surprised by the G.A.O.'s findings, and understand they are based on actual data rather than the anecdotal evidence produced in certain newspaper articles, I would question precisely how the schools for the sample were selected. Would similar practices be uncovered if the same study were conducted in private non-profit and public schools? Nevertheless, the G.A.O. has put empirical evidence of potentially questionable behaviour on proprietary campuses into the public domain.

#### *2.1.8 Institutional Pressure*

For the purposes of this study, 'institution' means a for-profit educational organization with a corporate structure. 'Institutional pressure' refers to pressure applied (by representatives of that institution) to employees in order to achieve a desired business outcome. Previous studies have established a relationship between pressure as experienced by staff members and arguably questionable workplace practices. The need to meet work-related goals is identified as a major source of pressure (Petry, Mujica and Vickery 1998).

Some employees within the proprietary industry allege that pressure has been applied to staff by employers to behave in ways that are beneficial to the business yet potentially detrimental to students. For example, Oureshi, Gross and Desai (2014) describe the experiences of staff working in the admissions and student finance departments of ITT Technical Institute, a well-known for-profit corporation. One woman claims that her job was to prey on the anxieties of prospective students in order to persuade them to enrol. She says that the work felt more like sales than college admissions (*"I was told explicitly that we don't enroll and we don't admit: We are a sales force."* p. 1). Another employee describes how prospective students were *"browbeaten and hassled into signing forms on their first visit to the school"* (p. 2). The use of sales tactics of this nature is concerning to some:

*"Many who work in traditional colleges and universities look on for-profits as charlatans out for nothing more than a quick buck."* (Tierney and Hentschke 2007, p. 2)

Others recognise that schools are competitive when it comes to enrolments and use aggressive marketing tactics to attract military veterans in particular (Folkman Schulz 2000). Zucchini and Rivera (2012) suggest that this proactive stance has reaped both financial benefits and condemnation (*"Anger grows over GI Bill profiteers"*, p. 1) as for-profit schools receive a disproportionate percentage of GI Bill payments and yet are responsible for almost 50 percent of student loan defaults. Cronin and Bachorz (2006) suggest that for-profit institutions *"may unduly pressure admissions (and financial aid) officers to emphasise quantity, not quality"* (p. 16).

For the average staff member, knowing that performance will be judged according to enrolment and retention figures is a potential source of anxiety. This creates a stressful working environment in which employees may feel compelled to engage in questionable strategies in order to retain their jobs. The feeling of helplessness, which comes from not being able to control students' life circumstances and prevent them from leaving, is particularly stressful as Williams (2003) explains in his definition of workplace stress:

*"the harmful physical and emotional responses that can happen when there is conflict between job demands on the employee and the amount of control an employee has over meeting these demands."* (p. 1)

It seems, therefore that employees in for-profit colleges face various challenges that are unique to their industry. Firstly, they must seek a balance between providing education and servicing the needs of a profit seeking business. Certain strategies they are expected to employ in order to increase revenue may seem at variance with the best interests of the students. The common practice of scrutinizing revenue-linked, rather than educational outcomes for performance evaluation, is disconcerting, and places staff under duress. In addition, some staff may face a personal dilemma regarding whether it is morally justifiable to sell education at a profit.

#### *2.1.9 The Morality of Selling Education for Profit*

Sandel (2000) suggests that extending commercial markets beyond traditional boundaries can have unfortunate consequences such as the *"injustice that can arise when people buy ... things under conditions of severe inequality"* (p.94). Somewhat surprisingly, although fees in proprietary colleges are higher than in the public sector, the product is targeted at a



demographic with severely restricted financial means (Chung 2004). What prompts students with low incomes to invest in a relatively expensive education? Many have minimal academic preparation and would not be accepted at conventional universities (Kutz 2010). In addition, they are often looking for a 'fast track' to employment and places at the more reasonably priced community colleges are limited (Snider 2010) leaving few alternatives. The above-cited Government Accountability Office report found that admissions representatives at the schools investigated "*employed hard-sell sales and marketing techniques to encourage students to enroll*" (Kutz 2010, p. 9) and website enquiries from undercover applicants "*led to a flood of calls*" from for-profit colleges, in one case up to a total of 182 calls in a month (p. 15). These data arguably suggest aggressive sales tactics.

Not all market choices are truly voluntary, particularly when someone living in a state of penury makes decisions based on desperate need (Sandel 2012). Students may feel compelled to purchase for-profit education out of "*dire economic necessity*" (Sandel 2012, p. 186) in the hope that vocational training will lead to employment. This vulnerable position is often compounded by minimal understanding of loan conditions (Lee 1996) leading to high default rates. A default on a student loan will appear on the borrower's credit record and make it harder to obtain a credit card, car loan or mortgage (Kutz 2010). However, the fact that Financial Aid can fund almost the entire cost of a degree means that many students borrow large amounts of money from the federal government and make up any shortfall between Financial Aid and the actual cost of a programme with private loans thus taking on even greater debt. The federal government's Consumer Financial Protection Bureau is currently investigating at least two of the larger for-profit corporations for selling predatory private loans to students (Oureshi et al. 2014).

Does placing education in the market place degrade the service provided? Sandel (2012) gives the emotionally compelling examples of selling babies and human organs. Fewer people are morally outraged by corporations charging a high price for a college degree. However, if employees prioritise generating revenue over serving students, owing to pressure to meet targets, this is cause for concern. Putting profits before people in an area such as education, which is generally regarded as necessary for the common good, is certainly a questionable priority.

Some commentators utterly reject the commercialization of education (Allen 2014; Tilak 2008):

*“One notices only practical economic compulsions and vested interests in making quick money, and no theoretical base for the arguments to treat education as a commodity rather than as a public good.”* (Tilak 2008, p. 459)

Indeed Tilak cynically questions whether for-profit institutions can distinguish *“between higher education and the production of cars and soaps”* (p. 459). Tilak’s statement is reminiscent of remarks made by teachers and students with whom I worked who referred to admissions representatives as ‘used car salesman’. To those in the admissions department who truly cared about the students, this was highly offensive. Nevertheless, some people felt that the eagerness and haste with which some representatives enrolled students resembled closing a deal at a second-hand car dealership.

Allen (2014) voices concerns regarding the directing of resources away from faculty and towards investors, claiming that a *“naïve addiction to markets can irretrievably wreck public or indivisible goods”* (p. 36). Certainly, employees at ITT Technical Institute quoted above allege that college enrolments are treated as sales opportunities. However, Ball (2007) finds that he can neither fully support the public sector nor totally condemn privatization:

*“some education businesses do some things well, and perhaps better than some of the public sector.”* (p. 187)

For advocates of for-profit education, student needs may appear reconcilable to corporate interests. For others who perceive that institutional pressure is applied in order to encourage arguably questionable behaviours, employment within the industry may not be a comfortable prospect. My personal inability to thrive in a for-profit environment could be attributable to a number of factors, including a perception of ‘otherness’. However, the sense of being ‘othered’ may have come from the failure to reconcile my views of education and beliefs about what is morally acceptable, to the requirements of my role as a manager. Whatever may prove to be the case, a consideration of the literature relating to ‘othering’ is highly pertinent (see 2.2 below).

In summary, this section described how today's for-profit post-secondary sector in the United States evolved from small businesses offering intensive training for specific trades during the colonial era. The widest industry expansion occurred after the introduction of the GI Bill in 1944, and in 1972 when the government amended its definition of an educational institution to include for-profit colleges, thereby giving proprietary students access to federal financial aid. Today, there are around 2,000 for-profit colleges in a market dominated by 14 major corporations worth \$26 billion and serving 13 percent of the country's college population. Proponents of proprietary education vaunt easier access to education for students who might otherwise be restricted by a lack of college places and/or entrance requirements they are unable to satisfy. For-profit colleges also provide strong investment opportunities for business owners, equity funds and shareholders. Retention and completion figures compare favourably with those in the public sector, in part owing to the greater accountability of staff members who are expected to monitor attendance in a proactive measure to prevent attrition.

However, concerns have arisen, particularly during the Obama Administration regarding enrolment practices that appear to target students from at-risk populations. In addition, high rates of tuition (compared with publicly funded colleges) and a lack of post-graduate employment opportunities have been linked to loan default rates that exceed those in the public sector. A Government Accountability Office investigation uncovered misleading and fraudulent practices in a selection of proprietary schools, though no comparative study was conducted in the public sector. Evidence was given of institutional pressure applied to staff to engage in questionable practices – for example in admissions procedures – leading to a stressful work environment. Finally the morality of selling education for-profit was considered together with the targeting of vulnerable students with limited educational options.

## **2.2 'Otherness' and 'Othering'**

It is possible that colleagues with whom I worked within the proprietary industry felt a sense of inner conflict when it came to whether education should be a public good or a marketable commodity. However, the morality of selling education for profit was rarely discussed. As I had doubts throughout my career in for-profit education about the profit motive behind the institutions for which I worked, this apparent acceptance of the commodification of education by my co-workers made me feel 'othered'.

‘Othering’ is the undesirable objectification of another person or a group of people MacQuarrie (2010). It is a term used to describe behaviour whereby those perceived as different from us become victims of *“perpetuating prejudice, discrimination, and injustice either through deliberate or ignorant means”* (MacQuarrie 2010, p. 3). ‘Othering’ is generally perceived as a pejorative, even confrontational act (Johnson, Bottorff, Browne, Grewal, Hilton and Clarke 2004; MacQuarrie 2010; Palfreyman 2005). Palfreyman (2005) describes ‘othering’ as the way in which *“the discourse of a particular group defines other groups in opposition to itself”* (p. 213). The ‘other’ is frequently viewed as inferior and ‘othering’ can *“reinforce and reproduce positions of domination and subordination”*, (Johnson et al. 2004, p. 253). The term *“other”* typically refers to perceptions of nationality or ethnicity (Palfreyman 2005) for example the British origins that distinguished me from my colleagues. Certainly ‘othering’ highlights differences between one (often dominant) group and another (often subordinate and numerically inferior) group as for example in early ethnographic and anthropological studies where other races and tribes were *“objectified or exoticized”* (MacQuarrie 2010, p. 3). However, ‘othering’ could also happen to individuals who do not fit within the group:

*“The moment we step into the classroom, we are immediately marked as ‘different’ by some of our students. It is a constructed difference, to be sure, that devolves from measurement against an unnamed, absent standard”*  
(Laubscher and Powell 2003, p. 213).

Laubscher is distinguishable by both his (foreign) accent and his physical appearance. He *“wears the uniform of difference like a branded mark of his place in the world”* (Laubscher and Powell 2003, p. 214). However, owing to his status as a faculty member, he sees himself as shifting between *“privileged or marginalised status, depending upon which aspect of difference one is exploring”* (p. 207). The notion that one can have more than one – or even multiple selves, is pertinent to the present research and is explored further below.

### 2.2.1 ‘Othering’ in Relation to Multiple Selves

‘Othering’ has been described as a need to distinguish between ‘me’ and ‘not me’ in order to establish a coherent sense of self (MacQuarrie 2010, p.3) but is one’s sense of self a constant, or does it change according to content and social circumstances?

Aldiabat and Navenec (2011) claim that human beings can “*use imagination to get outside of themselves, and to look back at themselves as others do*” (p. 1066). This notion, attributable to Charon (1979) is fundamental to the symbolic interactionism at the heart of my epistemological stance to be discussed in more detail later. If we accept that human beings can view themselves objectively (Aldiabat and Navenec 2011) the autoethnographer should be able to reflect upon her actions in terms of what she perceives, and in terms of what she imagines others see.

The perception of self as ‘other’ is pertinent to this autoethnography, particularly the notion that one is seeking to identify self and might have a series of ‘selves’ depending on specific circumstances (Laubscher and Powell 2003). This phenomenon, known as having “*multiple subject positions*” (Laubscher and Powell 2003, p. 211) is often accompanied by switching from one to another depending on context and social demands. These positions come from constructs of identity related not just to ethnicity but also to gender and class. In the autoethnographic passage above where I relate my first day at work on a proprietary campus, I appear to sympathise with the plight of the students, however my choice of language suggests that I perceive myself as coming from a different, presumably better class (p. 10, above). When I speak of students facing challenges I have never experienced, the examples I give (homelessness, lack of medical insurance) distinguish me as a middle class person encountering people from lower-income groups. My description of “*grubby attire*” and students who “*could barely write a coherent sentence*” strongly suggests a sense of superiority albeit coupled with shock and concern. Indeed, we present multiple selves to the outside world depending on what we choose to write and how we write it (Short 2010). ‘Othering’ creates an “*Us and Them*” situation which “*constructs an identity for the Other and implicitly for the Self*” (Palfreyman 2005, p. 213). In marking and naming those thought to be different, we actually construct our own identities in reference to those of others (Johnson et al. 2004).

Together with being ‘othered’ comes:

*“the seductive pressure to accept (‘others’) projections as defining oneself ... sometimes, it is easier simply to be what others want you to be.”* (Laubscher and Powell 2003, p. 214)

Therefore, there is a dual challenge inherent in being ‘othered’, that of processing the potentially negative consequences of others’ perceptions while resisting a particular view of self that “*carries an attribution of less value or a hierarchy of worth*” (Laubscher and Powell 2003, p. 205).

Possible consequences of ‘othering’ include “*marginalization, decreased opportunities, and exclusion*” (Johnson et al. 2004, p. 254). There are also ‘others’ who are grudgingly accepted as part of a group rather than overtly marginalised. They often feel “*forever grateful that they have been let in but know that they never truly belong*” (Laubscher and Powell 2003, p. 221).

Being ‘othered’ is generally regarded as negative objectification (MacQuarrie 2010). However, historical ‘othering’ leading to discrimination against minority populations by dominant cultures for “*enslavement, indenture, assimilation or exclusion*” (MacQuarrie 2010, p. 7) is not the focus of the present study. Of greater relevance is the kind of ‘othering’ typically involving “*maintaining social distance and making value judgments (often negative) based on stereotyped opinions*” (Palfreyman 2005, p. 214). It is important to recognise that this could be a two way process and that I, in perceiving myself as the ‘other’, could be as guilty of value judgements as those who judge me. I plan to use my data to substantiate this observation, or not, as the case may be. Such opinions can lead to assumptions about the ‘other’:

*“to be marked as different acknowledges a process whereby the mere fact of difference conjures up qualities that people then attribute to, or project onto the marked other.”* (Laubscher and Powell 2003, p. 205)

Those who project these stereotypical qualities often see themselves as owning the “*cultural space*” into which the “*other*” has intruded (Laubscher and Powell 2003, p. 221).

Laubscher and Powell (2003) use autoethnography to explore ‘otherness’ within the context of their lives as teachers in the hope that their stories:

*“ prompt educators to reflect on their experiences with students or colleagues who they regard as different.”* (p. 210)

Powell was aware, for example, of comments made by colleagues that indicated that they saw her as different, while they self themselves identified as “*normal*” (p. 208). During my career in for-profit education I was frequently asked where I was from, a question that implied a perceived difference.

When we sense that we are viewed as ‘other’, our reactions may be emotional rather than intellectual (Laubscher and Powell 2003). There is evidence of this in the autoethnographic data presented on p. 44 below. How did this emotional response impact my performance at work? Did it intensify a personal sense of victimisation, which led to assuming the role of a scapegoat?

In this section I defined ‘othering’ as a pejorative and confrontational act of objectification, and a widely discussed mental construct in social science, often used to reinforce positions of domination and subordination. Historical ‘othering’, encountered in anthropological studies, where certain groups are often viewed as exotic and inferior, is of less relevance to this study than the perception of self as ‘other’. Indeed if one defines oneself in terms of others, there is a potential for code switching between a series of selves depending on context. ‘Othering’ frequently results from ethnic or cultural differences and can result in marginalization and exclusion, which in turn may have negative consequences such as scapegoating.

### **2.3 Splitting, Projecting and Scapegoating**

‘Othering’ is generally pejorative in nature and promotes negative behaviours such as domination and discrimination (MacQuarrie 2010). When people who work together within an institution are unable to overcome work-related difficulties and negative behaviours ensue, there is a tendency to apportion blame, hence the use of the term ‘scapegoating’ (Cooke 2007; Rothschild, Landau, Sullivan, and Keefer 2012; Wilson 1993). Is it possible that in a challenging work environment a person who is ‘othered’ might come to be regarded as the cause of work-based tensions thus shifting his/her perception of self from that of outsider to scapegoat?

The workplace can be both stressful, and rife with negative feelings, which if not processed adequately, may be split and projected towards colleagues (Krantz 2001; Obholzer and Roberts 1994). According to James (1999) “*Educational institutions are*

*locales of particularly high levels of emotion*” and managers “*are exposed to a range of feelings which they experience both consciously and unconsciously*” (p. 244). System-wide features such as institutional pressure, can affect managers at all levels. Indeed being able to cope with or transform emotions derived from stressful situations is identified as “*a key educational leadership task*” (Dunning, James and Jones 2005, p. 244). It is highly probable that those in elevated positions within corporately owned educational organizations are also subjected to pressure, for example from shareholders intent on increasing profits. Difficult feelings arising from working under duress can be accepted, contained and changed into “*benign and acceptable forms*” or managers can employ the “*social defense of splitting and projection*” (Dunning et al. 2005, p. 244). This is where negative feelings are separated from more positive ones and projected towards co-workers, often in subordinate positions. The outcome can be the creation of a disturbing and threatening organizational environment (Krantz 2001).

On a college campus these difficult feelings can be split and projected downwards towards employees such as faculty and administrators who, as a consequence may feel as though they are operating under a barrage of negativity on a daily basis. If unbearable feelings are not adequately transformed, thus minimizing the potential impact of splitting and projecting, the outcome could be the creation of “*more dangerous organization phenomena*” (Dunning et al. 2005, p. 244) than the original negativity itself. Continual splitting and projection of unbearable feelings could lead to “*blame, demonization, scapegoating and bullying*” of an employee and eventually compel that employee to leave his or her employment (Dunning et al. 2005, p. 257). Rather than viewing such an individual as troublesome, we could regard him or her as “*an institutional mouthpiece, into whom all the staff have projected their disquiet*” (Obholzer and Roberts 1994, p. 132) and thus view the employee as both a scapegoat and a spokesperson.

There is certainly a possibility, scapegoat or not, that we as individuals are responsible for the predicaments we find ourselves in at work. For example, even though unbearable feelings may overwhelm us to the point of desperation, we still have a choice as to how we process those feelings. At what stage are we no longer able to process negativity in order to render it more benign? My autoethnographical data may show the extent to which I was responsible, or not, for electing to re-transmit difficult feelings. If an ability to transform projected feelings is crucial (Dunning et al. 2005) then an inability to do so presumably



contributes to eventual scapegoating. Despite the fact that Dunning et al. conducted their research in three maintained secondary schools in Wales, in other words a somewhat different environment to that of for-profit post-secondary education in the United States, the notion that splitting, projecting and eventual scapegoating could take place elsewhere seems plausible. Indeed, it could possibly happen, as described, in non-educational working environments, such as hospitals where a hierarchical management structure is in place and negative feelings are present (Cooke 2007).

There are examples in the literature of splitting and projection in the proprietary industry leading to possible scapegoating. ‘Jennifer’ and ‘Tressie’ both left the for-profit school where they were working feeling completely disenchanted and cynical about pressures placed upon them to exploit vulnerable students:

*“After six months at ITT Tech, (Tressie) McMillan Cottom quit. That same day, she called up every one of the students she’d enrolled and gave them the phone number of the local community college.”* (Oureshi, Gross and Desai 2014, p. 2)

In another scenario which depicts both institutional pressure and potential scapegoating ‘Jennifer’ complains about being forced to pull students out of class and threaten them with expulsion if they did not make an immediate payment for tuition costs not covered by federal grants and loans:

*“My supervisors and my campus president were breathing down my neck, and I was threatened that I was going to be fired if I didn’t do this.”* (p. 3)

Oureshi et al. (2014) are investigative reporters working for a magazine with an unashamedly left-wing bias. Their article, disapprovingly entitled “*How For-Profit Colleges Rip You Off*” does not present a balanced view and only the students’ stories are told. The schools involved are not given the opportunity to comment. Though this may detract from the academic value of the work, the content does nevertheless appear to be representative of views expressed elsewhere in the media and the scenarios described are reminiscent of some I personally experienced. My plan is to determine whether my data show evidence of splitting and projection of unbearable feelings and if so, by whom and

towards whom? My perception is that I too, was scapegoated. Is there evidence in the data to support this view?

## **2.4 Summary of Key Points of Literature Review**

A review of literature pertaining to the history of the proprietary education in the United States revealed that for-profit education dates back to the colonial era of the 17th century during which period schools offering training in specific trades were run as small business. These businesses sought to address a societal need in the same way as contemporary career colleges by providing vocational education not available elsewhere. They advertised their programmes using similar selling points to modern-day for-profit institutions. That is, a fast return on customer investment by preparing graduates quickly and efficiently for gainful employment.

Although the proprietary industry grew steadily throughout the next two centuries, the biggest surge in growth came after two pivotal events in the 1900s. The first was the introduction of the GI Bill in 1944, which provided educational funding for ex servicemen and women. The second was the 1972 re-definition by the federal government of the term “educational institution” to include for-profit schools and colleges. This recognition of proprietary colleges enabled students attending for-profit schools to obtain federal Financial Aid for the first time. Educational corporations saw the opportunity to benefit from government subsidies and proactively recruited students from low income groups who otherwise had very limited access to higher education. By 2010, for-profit post-secondary institutions served 13 percent of the student population and 14 major corporations had a net worth of \$26 billion.

The literature illustrated both positive and negative aspects of proprietary education. Positive features included easier access for students unable to meet public university entrance requirements, more availability of programmes than at community colleges and a caring and attentive attitude towards student absences and obstacles to success. From a business point of view the industry offered an attractive investment opportunity. Concerns raised by the literature included the alleged targeting of vulnerable populations by recruiters, high tuition fees and no guarantee of employment after graduation despite the vocational nature of programmes. A Government Accountability Office investigation uncovered “*fraudulent practices*” (Kutz 2010, p.7) on a number of campuses though the

study was by no means comprehensive and similar studies were not carried out in the public sector.

As a British educator with no experience of proprietary education prior to moving to the United States, I felt uncomfortable working on a campus that sold education for profit. I was therefore interested in the extent to which such phenomena as ‘othering’ and scapegoating might have contributed to this dissonance of function, belief and ethic. A review of the literature suggested that though ‘othering’ is frequently pejorative and confrontational, viewing self as ‘other’, and code switching between a number of perceptions of self were more pertinent to an autoethnographic examination of the proprietary industry than the historical notion of an exotic ‘other’. The literature also suggested that one of the negative consequence of ‘othering’, which involved the splitting and projecting of unbearable or difficult feelings towards colleagues in the workplace, could lead to scapegoating.

There is to date a dearth of scholarship in the areas mentioned above with specific reference to for-profit post-secondary education. Much of the literature available on the proprietary industry takes the form of biased reporting in the popular press rather than academic research. Anecdotes are related but rarely analysed in terms of what they tell us about for-profit education. There is some scholarly research into student retention but little is known about the views of staff and faculty. In literature relating to the history of the proprietary industry, the emphasis appears to be on the effectiveness of certain schools at generating revenue rather than the morality of selling education or the possible benefits to society. The phenomena of ‘othering’ and scapegoating are not addressed in the literature relating to proprietary education. I intend to explore these issues in a scholarly fashion in order to address this deficiency.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Introduction

As previously stated, my intention is to discover what my experiences as a British educator in the United States reveal about the proprietary industry and phenomena such as ‘othering’ and scapegoating. To achieve this objective, a method is required that will enable the researcher to access important information from personal data and interpret it in the wider context of for-profit education. Autoethnography is an approach that describes and analyses personal experience in order to extract wider cultural implications (Ellis, Adams and Bochner 2011; Chang 2008) thus making it an appropriate choice of method.

This chapter will give the rationale both for choosing autoethnography as a research method and for selecting an analytical rather than an evocative approach. The ontological and epistemological position of the researcher will be discussed and details will be provided regarding the research setting and participants. Information relating to the collection, management, presentation and analysis of data is also included together with ethical considerations and evaluation criteria. In order to discuss and illustrate method and methodological issues, the chapter begins with an early piece of autoethnographic data.

#### 3.2 Data Set 2: ‘Othered!’

**Written May 2011, one month after I had left the College, recounting events from two years before.**

*“Did he mention anything?” I was curious as to what our Divisional President (the manager in overall charge of more than 30 colleges) had said to my supervisor (the Acting College President – in temporarily to replace our retired President while a permanent replacement was sought). To be honest, I was taken aback that he had wanted to meet with me at all. In a results-driven business, the ‘Big Cheese’ only tended to interview campus directors who were not meeting their targets. I was doing well, making budget and achieving improved results year-on-year. I had expected our VIP visitor to subject our struggling Director of Career Services to a grilling and was surprised, though not worried when I was summoned to the President’s office for what turned into a 45 minute discussion on retention and ‘effective teaching’. I felt comfortable about my*

*answers and referred at least twice to my doctoral research to back up points about the importance of building a sense of community for the students. My interlocutor seemed more interested in nominating individual instructors and asking me how 'good' they were. He wanted examples of how well they knew their students ("Does he know what they had for breakfast? Does he know why they look tired?"). I thought the questions were legitimate though he barely gave me time to answer. I agreed that 'knowing' students can be a critical factor in addressing their needs. I actually quite enjoyed the encounter, was intellectually stimulated by it and returned to my office feeling quite happy.*

*Thus, my supervisor's response to my question came as a shock: "He said he thinks you may be too academic for the position. But then he said it might be your accent". "That's racist!" I blurted. In my 15 years as a speaker of British English living in the United States, I have only ever received a positive response to my accent. I speak Southern British English - a version relatively close to Received Pronunciation. My experience is that Americans tend to make assumptions about my being well educated based on the way I speak. This is generally a positive thing. Here, the suggestion appeared to be that my educated sounding British accent prevented me from communicating effectively with my student population. "I told him you had no problems at all relating to the students", my supervisor said. "I shouldn't worry about it." I wondered if she was regretting actually repeating his comments to me. "Heaven forbid I should be academic" I said, "I'm only the Academic Dean!"*

### **3.3 Choice of Method**

The recollection recorded above is an example of "*personal memory data*" (Chang 2008, p. 71). This incident feels important in that it recounts an event which I found disconcerting at the time and which continues to trouble me now. However, a personal sense of indignation at a manager's reaction to my accent tells us more, for now, about me than about the proprietary industry. (Am I being hypersensitive? Is this a defensive response on my part to a suggestion that may be valid? The perception that one's interlocutor is better educated may indeed be off-putting to some students.)

I am clearly affronted by the notion that my accent might prevent me from communicating effectively with students and hence a perception of being 'othered' arises. My intention is to investigate both why this kind of 'othering' might occur (and/or be perceived) and what

the text tells us about how employees in general in the proprietary industry are treated. Autoethnographic analysis is, in my view, one way of accessing the meaning behind the interaction between the corporate visitor and me.

Autoethnography is a research method that uses personal data to analyse cultural assumptions (Ellis, Adams and Bochner 2011; Chang 2008). These data are often referred to as ‘narratives’ because they offer a written account of events that are connected by the participation of the author. Scholarly interpretation distinguishes these accounts from autobiography. Autoethnographies rarely relate the author’s entire life history, but instead capture the pivotal moments in a particular period of time described and interpreted in such a way as to illuminate certain aspects of society.

Autoethnography differs from other qualitative methods in that the author is a participant who incorporates his/her actions, thoughts, and feelings into a research topic by first describing events, then engaging in a reflective analysis of those events in order to create insights into a particular area of study (Duarte 2007). In this instance, the topic under examination is the proprietary industry in the United States. An attempt to impose realist assumptions upon a social context of this nature could prove limiting (Riessman 2002). Indeed, the decision not to follow a positivist or modernist approach is not a rejection of science but a rejection of the “*scientism*” that would deny autoethnographers their voice (Sparkes 2002, p. 37).

There are many viable ways of collecting and analysing data without compromising the quality or integrity of scholarship (Markula, Grant and Denison 2001). While the analysis of statistics can render significant outcomes, so can the analysis of narrative. With the present research, given the number of incidents and events of potential importance, the narrative analysis is likely to be thematic. The intention here is to achieve something that ‘old’ science could not, for autoethnography can “*reach parts of social understanding that established methods cannot reach*” (Woods 1999, p. 48). The incorporation of ‘facticities’ into data would be an example of this. They add a new dimension to the research - that of personal reality. Denzin (1989) used the word ‘*facticities*’ to describe what lies between fiction - which no one believes to be true - and facts that are believed to be true. ‘Facticities’ are facts as experienced and interpreted by the individual, for example the personal memory data presented on page 44 above. I do not claim that others would

perceive the events that I describe exactly as I perceive them. Nevertheless, for me, these events are factual.

So why is an interpretivist approach more effective in certain areas of social science? One reason might be the potentially transformative effect upon the author (see also Section 3.3.2 below for further exploration of this topic). The actual process of writing and analysing narrative events can lead to the creation of new ways of perceiving reality. As Giddens (1991) so aptly claims “*ontological security (is) threatened by fateful moments*” (p. 465). For some autoethnographers, that fateful moment is a career threatening injury or life threatening illness. In my case, it was a rejection of my role in for-profit education for reasons yet to be explained by analysis of the data.

Perceptions might also change for the reader:

*“for through reading, readers construct their own meanings and identify with or resist certain elements of a story.”* (Tsang 2000, p. 47)

For an example of this, see Mia’s description on p. 119 below of how my narratives prompted her to consider her own situation as a public educator.

### *3.3.1 Autoethnography as a Research Method in Education*

There are various examples of ‘otherness’, difference and marginalization being explored through autoethnography (Tsang 2000; Murphy 1987; McMahon and DinanThompson 2011; Yang 2012) hence it would seem to be an appropriate method for investigating, for instance, the reaction of a manager to my accent in the narrative above. However, Pennington (2007), Prior (2010) and Winograd (2002) have also used autoethnography to conduct educational research. Perhaps the example of autoethnography most relevant to the present study is Romo (2005). He chooses autoethnography as a means of exploring both Border Pedagogy and his role as a self-described Chicano professor in the United States, thus addressing – as is my plan – the possibility of ‘othering’ within an educational context.

### 3.3.2 Potential for Personal Transformation

Personal change is a frequently occurring theme in autoethnography (Franklin Klinker and Todd 2007; Wall 2006). Contemplating the use of autoethnography prompted me to revise my views on what constituted legitimate research. An autoethnographer could, like Wall, be “*forced to bend in a new way*” (2006, p. 4) in order to view his or her role from a new perspective. The traditional assumption that researchers should remain neutral is challenged and the researcher’s influence is acknowledged (Duarte 2007; Ellis, Adams and Bochner 2011).

Ellis and Bochner (2006) describe autoethnography as “*people in the process of figuring out what to do, how to live and the meaning of their struggles*” (p. 111). This statement applies to the current research in the context of my career and how the attendant pressures of working for large corporations in for-profit education have affected my life. Narrative stories related to various professional challenges form the basis of my work. I believe my data will chart these changes in me as a participant-author and illustrate the various ways in which I have grappled, in many cases unsuccessfully, with my role, and the professional expectations placed upon me. The measure of its effectiveness as a scholarly endeavor, however, is not the degree to which I develop personally but rather the extent to which the research focus is shifted from personal to institutional (Duarte 2007). It is this very shift, this link between micro and macro contexts that renders the method potentially fruitful. The personal element, however, coupled with a clearly delineated ontological and epistemological stance, is the starting point and the springboard, and as such, is of vital importance to the integrity of the research.

### 3.4 Ontological and Epistemological Position

Reconciling the philosophy of a qualitative method such as autoethnography to the structure and demands of academic research is challenging but possible (Wall 2008). Thus, a view of ‘what is’ seen through the lens of personal reality is justifiable provided the resultant research demonstrates academic rigour. Said rigour exists where ontology and epistemology are sufficiently explicit to illustrate *how* one has arrived at a *determination of what is*.

It would be logical to begin with the ontological premise:



*“the user of autoethnography would assume ‘personal reality’ to be a psychosocial construction, with varying emphasis on internality, externality, and personal agency.” (McIlveen 2008, p. 15)*

This personal reality, in my case, draws heavily on ‘facticities’ (Denzin 1989) which are facts relating to events as experienced and presented for interpretation by the individual, through, for example personal narrative such as the one presented on p. 44 (above). These ‘facticities’ are akin to what McIlveen (2008) describes as *“personal ‘truth’”* (p. 15) and are understood to be subjective:

*“It is assumed that the truth value of narratives depends on the subjective experiences and interpretations of the storyteller rather than truth in the objective sense.” (Miczo 2003, p. 473)*

With regard to epistemology, autoethnographers frequently draw upon symbolic interactionism in order to interpret data (Powell 2011; Allen Collinson and Hockey 2005). Symbolic interactionism is a theoretical perspective within an epistemology known as constructivism whereby *“meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting”* (Crotty 1998, p. 43) hence, we, as actors in social situations, construct our own truth.

Powell (2011) for example, uses symbolic interactionism to explore letters to her ex husband *“as data of the social construction of a marriage coming undone”* (p. 21). My data, including email exchanges with colleagues, could be perceived as data of the social construction of my failure in and departure from the proprietary industry. ‘Othered!’ describes the interaction between various parties on campus and the language choices made, in particular by the Regional Vice President. The author construes these choices to be symbolic of the act of ‘othering’. Both actors are constructing their own meanings: the Regional Vice President by seeing the Dean as *“too academic”* and the Dean by accusing the Regional Vice President of being racist.

However, what of the methodological considerations arising from these epistemological assumptions? Aldiabat and Le Navenec (2011) see symbolic interactionism and grounded theory as compatible in their goals, while Pace (2012) proposes grounded theory for those

seeking an analytical approach to autoethnography. Thus grounded theory as a method may facilitate interpretation of the data, certainly in terms of coding the data and developing theories that address the research question. The decision to take an analytical approach leads to another important methodological consideration, that of electing to write an analytical rather than an evocative autoethnography. By being “*consistent with qualitative inquiry rooted in traditional symbolic interactionism*” (Anderson 2006, p. 374) analytical autoethnography is reconcilable to the epistemological position of the present work.

### **3.5 Reasons for Choosing Analytical Autoethnography**

The selection of analytical over evocative autoethnography, relates directly to one’s ultimate purpose. In this case that purpose is to extract from the data new and useful information regarding for-profit post-secondary education in general and the possible presence of ‘othering’ and scapegoating in particular. Therefore, one could argue that the most effective way to do so would be to seek “*connections to social science theory*” (Anderson 2006, p. 379) rather than “*activate subjectivity and compel emotional response*” (Ellis and Bochner 2000, p. 744). Although evocative autoethnography, when artfully constructed, can express feelings and emotions extremely powerfully (see, for example Holman Jones’ account of her experience of adoption, 2005) it could also leave questions about the proprietary industry unanswered for it “*leaves the narrative to resonate with the reader, rather than offer an analysis of the occurrence*” (Struthers 2012, p. 11).

Murphy’s *The Body Silent* (1987) is a particularly effective exemplar of analytical autoethnography because the author rises “*above idiographic particularity to address broader theoretical issues*” (Anderson 2006, p. 379). Evocative autoethnography, in contrast, resists the temptation to explain, striving instead to evoke a response, thereby focusing on the process, rather than the product, the journey rather than the destination (Ellis and Bochner 2000). With the current research, both the journey and the destination are important. Therefore, analytical autoethnography is the more suitable option. It is capable of both describing the social world under investigation and moving beyond that particular environment to draw broader conclusions (Anderson 2006). In this way, what begins on a single proprietary campus becomes relevant to the industry as a whole.

### 3.5.1 Comparing and Contrasting Analytical and Evocative Approaches

The major difference between the two most recognised approaches to autoethnography can be summarised thus:

*“Analytical autoethnographers focus on developing theoretical explanations of broader social phenomena, whereas evocative autoethnographers focus on narrative presentations that open up conversations and evoke emotional responses.”* (Ellingson and Ellis 2008, p. 445)

Therefore the objective of examining the suspected phenomena of ‘othering’ and scapegoating in the proprietary industry is better served by analytical autoethnography. There could still be, however, unexpected emergent themes and attention paid to *“physical feelings, thoughts and emotions”* (Sparkes 2002, p. 74), as all are likely to be present when focusing on the self. Indeed Vryan (2006) questions the need to distinguish between analytical and evocative work. He contends that autoethnography can have elements of both and that his own dissertation on being an imposter is *“largely autoethnographic, partially evocative, and highly analytical”* (p. 406). His reluctance to accept that analytical and evocative styles are mutually exclusive is encouraging as incorporating elements of evocative autoethnography into what is a largely analytical work is permissible:

*“A distinction between analysis and creative or evocative first-person writing styles is unnecessary and counter productive, as are implications that an analytical project must avoid delving too much, too expressively, or exclusively in the autoethnographer’s experience.”* (Vryan 2006, p. 407)

The autoethnographic data ‘Othered!’ presented above includes examples of the thoughts and emotions to which Sparkes refers. The author’s reaction to being described as *“too academic”* is a mixture of shock and (implied) indignation. However, apart from a superficial judgement related to differences in accent, what motivation would the manager have for expressing such a notion? Why is being academic a problem in the case of an academic dean and does this reaction suggest that there is a broader social phenomenon to be identified in this and other data? An analytical approach would seem to be the most effective way of addressing these issues.

### 3.5.2 Key Features of Analytical Autoethnography

There are five key features of Analytical Autoethnography:

- (1) Complete member researcher status
- (2) Analytic reflexivity
- (3) Narrative visibility of the researcher's self
- (4) Dialogue with informants beyond the self
- (5) Commitment to theoretical analysis

(Anderson 2006, p. 378)

Examination of these features demonstrates how this research can be placed within Anderson's framework. With complete member researcher status ('CMR') the researcher "*is a complete member in the social world under study*" (p. 379). This applies to both pieces of narrative data I have presented so far, though with a significant difference. In the introductory piece on p. 10 (above) I am new to the proprietary campus where I have been hired as Associate Dean. I therefore still view the for-profit environment from the position of an outsider. This is clear from comments such as "*Nothing could have prepared me for my first day at work*". By the time I encounter the corporate visitor who questions my ability to relate to students, I am fully integrated into the campus team as evidenced by remarks such as "*I was doing well, making budget and achieving improved results year-on-year*". Regardless of any perception of being 'othered', as a staff member whose research site is also her place of work, I am a CMR. In fact I am an "*opportunistic*" CMR as an as opposed to a "*convert*" (Adler and Adler 1987) by virtue of the fact that I have "*acquired intimate familiarity through occupational ... participation*" (Anderson 2006, p. 379). Indeed CMRs come closest of all "*to approximating the emotional stance of the people they study*", their proximity to participants facilitating access to data (Anderson 2006, p. 380).

However, as I will explain later, some of my data was not knowingly collected for research purposes. In fact, much of the data already existed, for example in work-related emails. Thus, if I was embedded in the research environment but not consciously assuming the role of researcher, does that undermine my CMR status? I do not have, for example, the field notes or journals from that period that many autoethnographers collect (Chang 2008). My first example of journaling does not occur until I have left my first

place of employment and moved to a for-profit university (see Data Set 6, Appendix A). My research may reveal that rather than a complete member researcher, I am more “*the ultimate participant in a dual participant-observer role*” (Merton 1998, p. 18) aware of what is going on in my place of work and concerned enough to collect email data but not yet (consciously) in the role of a researcher.

Analytical autoethnography requires a degree of analytic reflexivity. The perspective of one who is ‘othered’ could be integral to this second key feature. Conversely, evocative autoethnography demonstrates “*skepticism toward representation of ‘the other’*” (Anderson 2006, p. 377) thus diminishing its effectiveness in studies such as this where ‘othering’ is of interest. Analytic reflexivity enhances one’s ability to understand the connection between the researcher and the researched, akin to observing participants through a doorway while contemplating one’s own reflection within the same frame (Schwalbe 1996).

The third key feature of analytical autoethnography is narrative visibility of the researcher’s self. Whereas many traditional ethnographers have chosen to treat their research settings as “*anthropologically strange*” (Hammersley and Atkinson 2005, p. 9) and by doing so appear invisible and omniscient, the analytical autoethnographer is a “*highly visible social actor within the written text*” (Anderson 2006 p. 383). Instead of striving to remain detached regardless of one’s involvement in the community under examination (a challenge faced by many ethnographers) the analytical autoethnographer presents her experience and emotional responses as relevant data. Being highly visible, however, should not render other participants less invisible, as dialogue with informants beyond the self (key feature number 4) is necessary in order to prevent: “*the tendency of the self-absorbed Self to lose sight of the culturally different Other*” (Rosaldo 1993, p. 7). Self-absorption could stem from a failure to adequately engage with others in the field. In an effort to avoid such solipsism, data from interviews with faculty members will be incorporated into the current research.

The final key feature of analytical autoethnography is a commitment to theoretical analysis. Evocative autoethnography contents itself with “*capturing what is going on*” (Anderson 2006, p. 387) albeit in an artfully constructed and powerfully evocative manner. Analytical autoethnography requires the researcher to implement an analytical method,

such as grounded theory. The chosen method is used to investigate specific topics (for example, the proprietary industry) and phenomena (such as ‘othering’ and scapegoating) and generalise from the personal to the societal (Sparkes 1996). While all autoethnographers are at the mercy of emergent themes, the analytical approach permits the researcher to steer the work in the direction of specific areas of interest and generate theory related to those themes.

In summary, five key features distinguish analytical autoethnography from its evocative counterpart (Anderson 2006) though characteristics of both are compatible within the same work (Vryan 2006). The objective of the current research is to use an analytical approach in order to develop theoretical explanations of social phenomena such as ‘othering’ and scapegoating (Ellingson and Ellis 2008) and thereby learn more about the social context in which for-profit post-secondary education in the United States operates.

### *3.5.3 Effectiveness of the Method and Associated Challenges*

*“Using self as subject is not a problem for me, but how self is used is very important.”*  
(Wall 2006, p. 10)

Autoethnography challenges the very notion that we can draw a clear distinction between fact and fiction, science and literature:

*“We have welcomed the blurring of genre, the complexity of writing, the shaggy boundaries between ‘fact’ and ‘fiction,’ ‘subjective’ and ‘objective,’ ‘true’ and ‘imagined’.”* (Richardson 2000a, p. 253)

This view corresponds to the declared aims of analytical autoethnography as the narrative itself can indeed resonate emotionally with the reader while data is used as a way of gaining insight into a social context or phenomenon more universal than the narrow context of the data themselves (Anderson 2006).

Autoethnography has the capacity to impact the reader using art (the narratives) and science (the interpretation of the narratives). This powerful combination *“makes those findings all the more potent in the social world”* (Thorne 1997, p. 129). Riessman (2002,

p. 217) sees narrative, rather than quantitative data as “*the organizing principle for human action*”. In other words, narrative is a way of expressing what cannot be described in numerical or other quantitative terms. The individual experiences that form autoethnographic data should have a wider application than the personal context in which they occur. In other words, just as it is rare for a human being to exist in isolation, “*to write individual experience is, at the same time, to write social experience*” (Mykhalovskiy 1996, p. 141). This idea, whereby individual actions become more meaningful in the context of societal implications coincides with the epistemological stance of symbolic interactionism which presupposes the creation of relationships with others through the exchange of symbols as represented by meaningful language (Powell 2011) and thereby does not view the individual as an isolated being.

While loosening the positivist restraints by admitting data relating to personal experience may increase the potential of a research enquiry, it by no means diminishes the scope of the challenge. Where work is autobiographical and reflects upon one’s own practice, it is “*often disconnected, irrational and illogical*” (Tenni, Smyth and Boucher 2003, p.3). A major challenge for the present research will be to “*fuse the personal and the societal*” (Sparkes 1996, p. 463) while identifying and analysing emergent themes.

Autoethnography, it seems, presents different challenges from other research techniques, not the least because of the unpredictability of the outcomes. It also renders the author vulnerable in ways that other studies would not, precisely because she is present and exposed in the writing. Perhaps the best autoethnography comes about when the author is vulnerable:

*“I’m willing ... I’m taking ... the proactive stance to struggle with something privately and publicly and I don’t know where this is going to go.”* (Flemons and Green 2002, p. 189)

There is a comparative lack of structure in autoethnography. Researchers often yield to the vicissitudes of emergent design and allow the writing “*to emerge (flow, cascade, unfold) rather than to construct it preordinately (a priori)*” (Lincoln and Guba 1985, p. 41). Flowing and cascading suggests a literary and artistic quality more common to evocative autoethnography. This is hard to achieve in all but the most skillfully composed of studies.

One might mitigate this challenge by adopting a more analytical approach thereby affording the work a clear scientific basis or, ideally, aspire to make the work both scientific and literary (Richardson 2000a).

### **3.6 Methods: The Research Setting and Participants**

The two campuses where I worked for a total of ten years will not be identified in order to protect the anonymity of colleagues and students. They were, however, both owned by large corporations. Autoethnographic data used in this study comes mainly from the first campus though some data from the second campus will be included. The first was a vocational school, typical of institutions where students train for entry-level positions in professions such as medical assisting, accounting and criminal justice. This description applies to hundreds of privately owned schools in the United States. The college was a for-profit enterprise with a population that fluctuated between 400 and 800 students. It operated all year round with one-week breaks between the four quarters (terms). Programmes included two-year associate degrees and shorter diplomas. Classes were held both during the day and in the evenings to accommodate students' work schedules and child care needs. This meant long working days for staff and faculty, most of whom were expected to work several evening shifts per week.

Diploma programmes generally focused on core courses (such as medical subjects for medical assisting) whereas the degree programmes added general education courses (such as English composition) to the required core. Students might have supposed that having a degree, rather than a diploma, would afford them greater employment opportunities, though we had no empirical data to support this notion. Based on anecdotal evidence, it appeared that the more successful students were the ones who interviewed well and were able to project a positive attitude, regardless of the credential they had obtained.

The second campus where I worked had a significantly smaller population (around 200 students) and offered bachelor's and master's degrees in business-related subjects. A large proportion of the students, particularly in the Master's of Business Administration programme, were already employed and seeking promotion or a career move. The undergraduate students resembled those at my first campus in that they were seeking the qualifications necessary to obtain employment. The staff at both campuses, myself included, typically worked 50 weeks of the year. There was no long summer break as in



traditional colleges and classes took place all year round. Scheduling classes in the summer created additional retention challenges as many students had young children and no access to affordable childcare during the school holidays.

As with all autoethnography, I am the principal participant. However, the educational society of which I was a part and those people with whom I interacted are also important. I, as researcher-participant on the first campus, worked as the Associate Academic Dean (later promoted to Academic Dean) and my responsibilities included managing 40 staff including around 26 teachers of whom 50 percent were full-time employees. The remainder worked as adjunct instructors. On the second campus I was responsible for managing faculty only, all of whom were employed part-time and most of whom had full-time day jobs which limited interaction to evenings only. I communicated with co-workers on both campuses daily, in person where possible, and by email. We had a common goal - that of attaining monthly, quarterly and annual retention targets. I also worked in tandem with other managers who were responsible for admissions, student finance and graduate placement. I reported to a campus president who was ultimately accountable for the overall financial performance of the college. There were also various members of the corporation's upper management, at regional and national level, who rarely visited the campus but contacted me frequently by telephone or email to quiz me about retention percentages. Many of these colleagues (for example the Regional Vice President in 'Othered!') feature in my narratives.

During my nine years at the vocational school I was urged constantly by campus supervisors and executives at the corporate office (located in another state) to devise ways of improving student retention. For this reason I met weekly with the entire faculty and fellow managers. During these meetings, we would go name by name over attendance rosters and share information regarding absent students. We would then decide how to address individual students' needs in order to affect a return to school. During these meetings, faculty members would often express frustration at their inability to control the factors which prevented students from attending class. These concerns are addressed more fully in the interviews I conducted with faculty members, discussed in Section 4.3.1. A more detailed description of data collection follows below.

### 3.7 The Collection and Selection of Data

Data sources in autoethnographic studies vary greatly. Admissible data types include personal memory data, interviews, personally produced texts, official documents and textual artefacts (Chang 2008).

The data that I plan to present and interpret relate to experiences I had while working in the proprietary industry, hence a developing plotline, which will be examined thematically. Some of the data were collected while on campus, though at the time I had not yet decided to incorporate them into an autoethnography. Data produced for purposes not related to my thesis “*preserve thoughts, emotions, and perspectives at the time of recording*” (Chang 2008, p. 107) and in this respect are untainted by the research agenda. Two letters of resignation exemplify this data type. One letter was composed but never submitted, and the other (comprising a single sentence) was used to inform my former supervisor of my intended departure. Additional examples of personally produced texts include a series of emails written in the workplace.

Other data are memory based. Personal memories are recognised as a primary source of information in autoethnography (Chang 2008; Sparkes 2002). My memory-based data come from making a list of pivotal moments in my for-profit career and producing personal memory narratives (Chang 2008) from my recollection of these events. These are incidents that have remained in my memory because of an emotional response at the time such as embarrassment, frustration or anxiety. Hindsight can be valuable with respect to memory-based data:

*“When you wait to retreat from your field to record self-observation, a less fresh memory is traded for a natural flow of occurrence”* (Chang 2008, p. 93).

In addition I intend to analyse interviews with faculty members, which though originally conducted as part of an aborted Delphi study into teachers’ attitudes towards retention, constitute a valuable contribution as “*dialogue with informants beyond the self*” (Anderson 2006, p. 378). Interviews are recognised as a common data collection technique in both ethnographic and autoethnographic field work (Anderson 2006; Chang 2008; Punch 2009).

The initial data collection comprised 48 data sets including: journal entries (13); memory-based pieces (ten); faculty and other interviews (seven); emails (seven); newspaper articles (three); medical and legal documents (two); retention reports with student level data from the campus where I worked (two); two letters; one response to a memory-based piece from a third party; one set of responses to a questionnaire administered to faculty as part of a previous Delphi study.

Following initial sorting by data type, the emails were condensed into two data sets for coding. One set consisted of six email exchanges linked by a common theme (student attrition) the other, although on a similar theme (student persistence) was treated separately as it was collected from the second campus where I worked rather than the first. The interviews were also consolidated into two data sets. One set comprised six faculty interviews, again linked by the common theme of student attrition, and the other consisted of a “Grand Tour – Mini Tour” interview with my spouse (see Chang 2008). The journal entries were deemed to be one data set as the chronological nature of the entries lent itself to analysis of the sequence in its entirety rather than individual pieces in isolation. Finally the two letters were analysed as a single set, in part because the second letter was so brief (a single sentence) but also because both were written for the same purpose, that of informing my supervisor of my resignation. This consolidation process reduced the overall number of data sets by 23 to 25 in total. These data sets were subsequently divided into categories and further reduced as described below.

### *3.7.1 Data Categories*

The categories chosen corresponded to narrative titles (inspired, and in some cases similar to, those used by Allen-Collinson and Hockey 2008) which I anticipated would enable me to tell my story chronologically beginning with an initial sense of ‘otherness’, progressing to individual discomfort, recognizing the discomfort of others, attempts at reconciliation to my situation and finally culminating in a concerted effort to escape an environment in which I was unhappy. Originally there were six categories:

**1) Narratives of Self as ‘Other’:** data related to feeling marginalised.

**2) Narratives of Resentment and the Suffering Body:** data related to feeling unhappy in my work.

**3) Narratives of the Suffering (faculty) Body:** data related to instructors' views and the way in which they were treated.

**4) Narratives of Sacrifice and Reconciliation:** data related to trying to reconcile myself to my situation.

**5) Narratives of Pilgrimage and Quest:** data related to attempts to find an escape route.

**6) Narratives of Empowerment:** data related to finding my way out of the mire by means of Autoethnography.

The final narrative category (6) was discarded after initial sorting as it was found to be too similar to category number 5, and therefore not a useful addition. The 25 data sets were further reduced to 18 as follows in **Table 1** (below).

**Table 1 - Data Sets by Data Type and Narrative Category**

| <b>Data Type</b>          | <b>Narrative Category</b>       |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Memory-based: 10          | Self as 'Other': 3              |
| Emails: 2                 | Suffering Body: 5               |
| Interviews: 2             | Suffering (faculty) Body: 2     |
| Letter: 1                 | Sacrifice and Reconciliation: 3 |
| Third Party Response: 1   | Pilgrimage and Quest: 5         |
| Questionnaire Response: 1 |                                 |
| Journal: 1                |                                 |
| = 18                      | = 18                            |

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**Discarded Data Sets:**

Media Articles: 3 (*Data deemed to be more relevant to literature review than autoethnographic analysis*).

Medical/Legal Documents: 2 (*Data not considered specific or detailed enough to be of interest*).

Retention Reports: 2 (*Proprietary and confidential information, appropriate for campus use only. This data was subsequently shredded in order to protect the privacy of all parties referenced*).

**Table 2** shows (by title) how many data sets fell into each category:

**Table 2 – Data Titles by Narrative Category**

| <b>Narrative Category</b>                   | <b>Data Set Titles</b>   |
|---|--|
| <b>1. Self as ‘Other’</b>                   | <i>My First Day as Associate Dean</i><br><i>Helen’s First Day</i><br><i>The Beginning of the End</i>   |
| <b>2. Resentment and the Suffering Body</b> | <i>Point of Departure</i><br><i>Another Bump in the Road</i><br><i>Dashed on the Rocks</i><br><i>Road Blocks En Route</i><br><i>How I feel about ‘Execution’</i> |
| <b>3. The Suffering (Faculty) Body</b>      | <i>Interviews with Faculty Members</i><br><i>Instructor Comments</i>   |
| <b>4. Sacrifice and Reconciliation</b>      | <i>The Mood Elevator</i><br><i>Psychic Buddhist Monk</i><br><i>The Persistence Plan</i>  |
| <b>5. Pilgrimage and Quest</b>              | <i>Informational Interview</i><br><i>Resignation Letters</i><br><i>Logging my Persistence</i><br><i>The New Boss Arrives</i><br><i>Grand Tour – Mini Tour</i>    |

Once the decision to draw upon grounded theory for analysis and interpretation was made the usefulness of these categories diminished. They did, however, serve a purpose in terms of the initial data collection and systemization.

### *3.7.2 Data Refinement and Reduction*

Effective data management, beginning early and occurring frequently, enhances efficiency, highlights redundancy and identifies deficiencies (Chang 2008). Data management for the present research comprised several stages of data sorting which took place over a period of three years. As described above, certain data sets were condensed in order to facilitate interpretation, while others were discarded for lacking relevancy. The original interpretation of data focused on themes emerging from the 18 data sets listed in **Tables 1** and **2** above. However, for a number of reasons, the data were further reduced to six sets only. These reasons included:

- 1) Reducing what appeared to be an excessive amount of data to what could reasonably be managed within the range and scope of the study.
- 2) Reducing redundancy and irrelevancy (Chang 2008; Wellington 2000).
- 3) The objective of creating a chronology that would guide the reader from early to later experiences. This process was facilitated by the earlier separation of data under narrative headings representing different stages of professional experience.
- 4) The desire to incorporate a variety of data types into the research rather than create an over reliance on one type, such as memory-based pieces.

The final selection of data is tabulated in **Table 3** (over).

**Table 3 – Final Data Selection**

| <b>Data set</b>                       | <b>Data Type</b> | <b>Narrative Category</b> | <b>Objective</b>   |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|---------------------------|--|
| 1. <i>First Day as Associate Dean</i> | Memory-based     | Self as ‘Other’           | Autoethnographic writing to orientate readers              |
| 2. <i>‘Othered’!</i>                  | Memory-based     | Resentment/Suffering Body | Discuss Method and methodological issues                   |
| 3. <i>Student Retention Issues</i>    | Emails           | Resentment/Suffering Body | Demonstrate issues with retention                          |
| 4. <i>Faculty Interviews</i>          | Interviews       | Suffering (faculty) Body  | Representation of how others deal with work-related stress |
| 5. <i>Resignation Letters</i>         | Letters          | Pilgrimage and Quest      | Examine different types of self that emerge                |
| 6. <i>Logging My Persistence</i>      | Journal          | Pilgrimage and Quest      | Represent conclusions                                      |

**Table 3** lists the six data sets eventually selected for analysis. Of the six, three were originally retained for reasons not directly related to the present autoethnography. These were the faculty interviews conducted during a study on instructor attitudes towards retention, the email exchanges, which formed part of daily communications in the workplace, and two resignation letters, only one of which was actually submitted. Of the remaining three data sets, two were memory based and one was a journal I kept while employed in my second position on a for-profit campus after the decision to undertake autoethnographic research had been made. It was determined that these six data sets would provide sufficient data for the present research. The desired chronology of events is implicit in the data set titles (1 being “*First Day*” and 5 being “*Resignation Letters*”). The final data set comes from the second campus and documents my last experience of for-profit education before departing from the proprietary industry. The original 18 data sets included a preponderance of memory-based pieces (ten pieces, compared with no more than two of any other data type). In order to redress the balance, only two were chosen for the final selection in order to avoid over reliance on memory-based data. The six data sets above represent five different data types. The biggest challenge posed by the data

reduction was determining which data were redundant, as during the early stages, they all seemed to have some relevance. My eventual selection was, in my judgement, both varied in terms of data type, representative in terms of participants and narrative category, and, as can be seen from the final column of **Table 3** ('Objective') each data set serves a specific purpose, whether it be to orientate readers, facilitate a discussion of methodological issues or illustrate a particular theme.

### 3.7.3 Data Classification

Once admissible data were selected, primary and secondary labeling as illustrated in **Table 4** below was conducted in order to classify the data. Labeling provided information regarding data types and locations and distinguished between dates of collection and dates of actual events. **Table 4** shows that the data finally selected for analysis were collected over a period of 13 months (though other discarded data were actually collected before and after the dates recorded below) and refer to events spanning an entire decade from 2002 – 2012.

**Table 4 - Data Log (Based on Chang 2008)**

| <i>Data Collection Strategy (primary labeling)</i> |               |                  |             |                 | <i>Data Content (secondary labeling)</i> |                                |                     |
|--|---------------|------------------|-------------|-----------------|--|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| <i>Data Set No.</i>                                | <i>Date</i>   | <i>Collector</i> | <i>Type</i> | <i>Location</i> | <i>Time</i>                              | <i>People Involved</i>         | <i>Source/Place</i> |
| 1.   | March 2012    | Dunford          | S/O Memory  | home            | 2002                                     | self/supervisor                | self/campus         |
| 2.   | May 2011      | Dunford          | S/O Memory  | home            | 2009                                     | self/supervisor/<br>RVP        | self/campus         |
| 3.   | June 2011     | Dunford          | Emails      | home            | 2010/11                                  | self/supervisor<br>RVP/CDR/DOA | self/campus         |
| 4.   | March 2011    | Dunford          | Interviews  | home/<br>campus | 2011                                     | self/faculty                   | faculty/campus      |
| 5.   | February 2011 | Dunford          | Letters     | home            | 2012                                     | self/supervisor                | self/campus         |
| 6.   | July 2011     | Dunford          | Journal     | campus          | 2011                                     | self                           | self/campus         |

**Key:** S/O = self-observational, RVP = Regional Vice President, CDR = Corporate Director of Retention, DOA = Director of Admissions.



Thus, the original 48 data sets collected during the research enquiry were initially reduced to 25 by condensing emails, interviews and journal entries into single rather than separate sets. The remaining 25 were then organised under narrative headings, the titles of which were inspired and/or partially copied from Allen-Collinson and Hockey (2008). At this juncture, seven data sets were discarded as peripheral or insufficiently specific to be of relevance. The remaining 18 data sets were finally reduced to six using the criteria listed at 3.7.2 above and classified using primary and secondary labeling.

### **3.8 Data Analysis and Interpretation**

The stated intention is to adopt an analytical rather than evocative approach in order to facilitate exploration of particular themes. The research is unlikely to fit neatly into any category owing to the retrospective nature of the decision to write an autoethnography making it impossible to produce field notes concurrently with observations on campus (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2000). In ideal circumstances the process of data analysis might have begun earlier (Chang 2008). However, when as researchers we deal with real life events, circumstances are rarely ideal, and we adapt methodology as appropriate (Miles and Huberman 1994; Punch 2009). It is also practical to take an eclectic approach towards the organization and interpretation of data as determined by specific circumstances (Punch 2009).

To code, analyse and interpret the data, principles of grounded theory (*“an investigative process for building a theory about a phenomenon by systematically gathering and analysing relevant data”*, Pace 2012, p. 6) will be used together with Chang’s ten *“Analysis and Interpretation Strategies”* (2008, p. 131). There is a strong relationship between grounded theory and the interpretive tradition of symbolic interactionism (Aldiabat and Le Navenec 2011). Grounded theory therefore fits within the epistemological stance of this research. Were the intention to produce an evocative work, this would not be the case as grounded theory ultimately may require the researcher to use an authoritative voice (Ellis and Bochner 2000). The tendency towards authoritativeness is apposite in the case of an analytical autoethnography with the specific objective of generating theory in relation to a particular social context and associated phenomena (Pace 2012). Grounded theory has been used, for example, to analyse the social context of a failed marriage (Powell 2011) and a mental health professional’s development (Short 2010).

Theoretical memoing (Holton 2010) is integral to the process. Owing to the chronology of the data collection, memoing began later than is usual and this possibly distinguishes the current work from more traditional studies. Grounded theory principles however, are not intended to be prescriptive (Pace 2012). Some favour flexibility:

*“No study conforms exactly to a standard methodology; each one calls for the researcher to bend the methodology to the peculiarities of the setting”* (Miles and Huberman 1994, p. 5).

Examples of memoing completed concurrently with data coding are nevertheless presented (see Appendix E) and the notion of building theory rather than testing it (Pace 2012) is entirely compatible with the aims of autoethnography. The conventional grounded theory stages of open coding, theoretical coding and selective coding in order to identify significant concepts, relate concepts to each other and delimit the research to a core concept will be an effective starting point.

Analysis and interpretation often happen concurrently and may overlap with each other (Chang 2008). However, though one is unlikely to be entirely independent of the other, the two should be distinguishable in terms of their purpose. Chang (2008 p. 128) sees analysis and interpretation as a *“balancing act between fracturing and connecting, between zooming in and zooming out, between science and art”*. Analysis requires the researcher to break down the data in order to identify significant concepts (zooming in or fracturing) whereas interpretation requires determination of how those concepts relate to each other (zooming out or connecting). Generally speaking, analysis takes place during the open coding stage of grounded theory while interpretation corresponds to the theoretical coding stage. Details relating to how data were coded for this study are provided in the following section.

### *3.8.1 Data Coding*

Pace (2012) and Chang (2008) both propose strategies for coding autoethnographic data. While Pace (2012, p. 1) explains how autoethnographers (specifically in the creative arts) *“can employ analytical strategies from the grounded theory tradition in their work”*, Chang does not specify a method. Instead she proffers ten *“Analysis and Interpretation Strategies”* (p. 131). A comparison of Pace and Chang’s strategies suggests that they

complement each other sufficiently to be used in tandem as guidelines for interpretation of the data in this study. The chart below (**Table 5**) shows the correspondence and overlap between the two:

**Table 5 - Comparison of Analytic Strategies**

**Pace (2012, pp. 10-13)**

**Chang (2008, p. 131)**

**A) Open Coding**

Identify significant concepts by breaking stories down into discrete incidents, actions or ideas

1) Search for recurring topics

2) Look for cultural themes

3) Identify exceptional occurrences

4) Analyse inclusion and omission

**B) Theoretical Coding**

Determine how concepts relate to each other

5) Connect the present with the past

6) Analyse relationships between self and others

7) Compare yourself with other people's cases

**C) Selective Coding**

Delimit coding to only those concepts that relate to a core explanatory concept (the main theme)

8) Contextualise broadly

**D) Sorting Memos and Writing Theory**

Sort theoretical memos into an outline and write up theory

9) Compare with social science constructs and ideas

10) Frame with theories

In summary, as an analytical approach to interpreting the data is favoured over an evocative approach, a suitable method of analysis is required. Grounded theory is an appropriate choice (Pace 2012) in conjunction with Chang's "*Ten Analysis and Interpretation Strategies*" (2008, p. 131). A table was produced (**Table 5**, p. 67) showing how these strategies overlap and complement each other. The conventional grounded theory stages of open coding, theoretical coding and selective coding in order to identify significant concepts, relate concepts to each other and delimit the research to a core concept, were deemed to be an appropriate starting point. The need for - and challenges associated with - concurrent theoretical memoing were discussed.

### **3.9 Ethical Considerations**

Protecting others from the potential harm caused by public exposure is of paramount importance. Therefore a deliberate choice has been made to prevent identification of both settings and participants. The objective is to safeguard the privacy of third parties without "*emasculating the narrative*" (Mellick and Fleming 2010, p. 311). As autoethnographies differ greatly depending on context, author and data, it is difficult to develop or follow prescriptive guidelines regarding what should or should not be included. There are undoubtedly risks related to unintentional identity disclosure and VIC (voluntary informed consent) should be considered where possible or practical (Mellick and Fleming 2010). Tactics such as "*anonymizing the narrative skillfully*" (Mellick and Fleming 2010, p. 300) can overcome this obstacle as for example with Olympic rower Tsang (2000) whose fellow crewmembers are not identifiable from her narrative even though a Google search reveals their names. Tsang's narrative focuses on her own story and as such other participants are not exposed to harm though some of their negative thoughts and actions (as perceived by Tsang) are described. The narratives in the present study are similar in that they focus on the author but also depict incidents and exchanges that may be perceived as negative. In this case, however, a Google search is unlikely to reveal names of co-workers as none of the events described were subject to press coverage.

In autoethnography, unlike other forms of research, it is difficult to determine precisely who the participants are. The author, for example is clearly a participant observer, but how does one classify the people with whom she interacts? It would be impractical to extract VIC from every person mentioned in the data. Mellick and Fleming (2010) feel that the "*the burden of responsibility on the researcher to seek VIC from other actors is cloudy*"

(p. 302). In addition, when the narrative is written retrospectively as with many autoethnographies, it may be impossible to secure VIC. During the research process, I will no longer have access to my former co-workers or the institutions where I worked. Ex-post facto consent as a protocol may be appropriate where access is still possible (Mellick and Fleming, 2010) and this is indeed what I have attempted to obtain in order to confirm that the instructors who agreed to be interviewed by me had no objections to the way in which I planned to incorporate the data into an autoethnography. (See Appendix G. Of the six faculty members interviewed, four replied to an emailed request with brief comments, which could reasonably be interpreted as permission to use the anonymised data. The other two did not reply and I learned later that they had both left the College.) With regard to those (anonymous) persons from whom I did not obtain ex-post facto consent (for example the Regional Vice President in ‘Othered!’) it should be noted that in all likelihood, the finished work “*will be read by only a small number of people (probably within academic circles)*” (Mellick and Fleming 2010, p. 312). Whether these readers are in Britain or the United States, they may not be familiar with the educational context, will probably not recognise the geographical setting and are unlikely to know any of the personalities involved.

Concerns certainly exist relating to identifiability and consent. However, not all autoethnographers seek to consult all participants, even those shown in a potentially negative light, about what was or was not included in the narratives:

*“We did not, however, seek [the same] assurances from other participants, such as the health-care professionals whose services we found so wanting and other ‘bit-part actors’ such as irresponsible dog-owners who feature in our narratives with somewhat negative connotations.”* (Allen Collinson and Hockey 2008, p. 214)

This decision, apparently made for both practical and academic reasons, is similar to mine. Struthers (2012, p.75) avoids “*using names of individuals or institutions to prevent identification*” and refers to discussions with his university’s Ethics Procedure Committee. Throughout the course of my research I have had conversations with successive supervisors at the University of Bath regarding ethical concerns. I completed an Ethics Form, which was approved by my former supervisor (see Appendix F). Further

discussions have taken place with my current supervisor (who is also the Department of Education's Ethics Coordinator). His view was that it was not my intention to cause harm to any individual but rather to shed light upon important issues relating to proprietary education in the United States. He agreed that obtaining ex-post facto permission, for example from faculty members who had consented to interviews, was ideal, but he also conceded that once I had left my place of work, this might be impossible. The University of Bath does not have a standard consent form that it requires research students to use. I therefore emailed participants where possible and asked them to confirm in writing that I had permission to use interview data for my autoethnography (see Appendix G for responses).

To summarise ethical concerns, while preserving the integrity of the research is paramount, so is protecting participants from harm. It is not practical or possible to secure informed consent from all participants. Therefore other measures are necessary, such as anonymizing the text. Nevertheless, wherever possible, consent was obtained. For example, the faculty members mentioned above who agreed to be interviewed for a previous study, were allowed to read the interviews and comment. They were given a written explanation of the change in research focus and asked to consent to my using their remarks as part of my autoethnographic data. I believe my work fully complies with BERA Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2011) in that I have carefully protected the identity of all persons. Protection is extended to participants either by anonymity or use of pseudonyms. However, while I have respected the privacy of all those involved or implicated in my work, I have also respected (in accordance with p. 4 of the aforementioned BERA guidelines) the democratic value of expressing an opinion (without harming any individual), my academic freedom to conduct (ethical) research and my responsibility to maintain certain standards in terms of the quality of my work.

### **3.10 Evaluation Criteria**

Autoethnography does not lend itself to traditional evaluation criteria of validity, reliability and generalizability:

*“When standard, traditional criteria of what makes a good ‘scientific’ or ‘realist’ telling are applied ... then autoethnographies will always disappoint.” (Sparkes 2002, p. 193)*

Applying traditional criteria could be construed as intellectual imperialism leading to the trivialization or dismissal of non-traditional studies (Sparkes 2002). Riessman's view (2002, p. 256) is that traditional notions of reliability "*simply do not apply to narrative studies*" while "*validity must be radically reconceptualised*". She draws a clear distinction between truth and trustworthiness. The former assumes an objective reality and is appropriate to positivist studies. The latter, deals with the social realm and is applicable to interpretivist research (Riessman 2002). 'Facticities' such as in the retelling of "Othered!" represent a personal interpretation of reality rather than the truth. However, a reasonable expectation of all autoethnographers would be that their work be deemed trustworthy.

Lather (1986, p. 67) reconceptualises validity as "*catalytic*". Catalytic validity refers to "*the degree to which the research process energises participants and alters their consciousness*". Richardson's alternative to standard tests of validity is "*not triangulation, crystallization*" (2000b, p. 934). In other words, a multi-faceted approach suggesting that multiple ways of evaluating qualitative forms of inquiry exist (Sparkes 2002). Crystallization might include, for example, measuring the extent to which a response is provoked in readers or estimating the potential to transform both the author and the reader. Sparkes suggests:

*"Various criteria in list form may act as a starting point for judging autoethnographies, but these may not apply on all occasions and other criteria can be added to or subtracted from them, depending on the circumstances."* (2002, p.224)

Lists of criteria might include Riessman's Levels of Representation 2002, or Halliday's Analytically Distinct Functions 1973 (cited Riessman 2002). Another option would be to replace traditional scientific criteria with those generally applied to literature such as emotive force, engagement with readers, verisimilitude, authenticity and integrity (Sparkes 2003). Rinehart (1998) simply suggests that we ask if the work is effective, while Riessman (2002, p. 258) proffers four ways of approaching validation in a narrative work: persuasiveness, correspondence, coherence and pragmatic use. Garratt and Hodkinson (1998, p. 523) consider it helpful to ask ourselves questions such as "*Does this account*

*work for us? Do we find it to be believable and evocative on the basis of our own experience?"* Richardson (2000a, p. 254) proposes the criteria summarised below:

- Substantive contribution – does this piece contribute to our understanding of social life?
- Aesthetic Merit – does this piece succeed aesthetically?
- Reflexivity – are there ethical issues? Is there sufficient self-awareness?
- Impact – does it affect me? Emotionally? Intellectually?
- Expresses a reality – does it seem ‘true’, a credible account of a cultural, social, individual, or communal sense of the “real”?

The above questions prompt yet more questions. For example, how does one judge whether a piece succeeds aesthetically? Does this criterion apply more to evocative than to analytical autoethnographies? How does one decide what a ‘reality’ is? These questions are unlikely to elicit definitive answers. Nevertheless, Richardson’s criteria are appropriate for evaluating the current research. If the work is intellectually and/or emotionally effective and makes a substantive contribution to the understanding of the proprietary industry in the United States, it will be successful. Without sufficient self-awareness, it is unlikely to succeed given that reflexivity is a necessary feature of analytical autoethnography.

It is clear from the suggested evaluation criteria above that although applying the traditional criteria of validity, reliability and generalizability to autoethnography poses a challenge, there are a variety of alternative ways in which research of this nature can be evaluated.

### **3.11 Summary of Key Points of Methodology Chapter**

The methodology chapter begins with a piece of autoethnographic writing in which the author perceives that she is being ‘othered’ by accent. It then discusses the use of autoethnography to research educational topics. The researcher’s ontological and epistemological positions are explained, as is her choice of an analytical approach to the method. Analytical autoethnography is then compared with evocative autoethnography and key features of analytical autoethnography are described. The effectiveness of the



method is discussed, as are attendant challenges. Specific details regarding the research setting, participants, data collection and data analysis are provided, followed by a consideration of ethical concerns. At the end of the chapter proposed evaluation criteria are presented.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter will describe the outcomes of the data coding, analysis and interpretation procedures outlined in Chapter 3. The results of the open, theoretical and selective coding and memo sorting stages are given, together with an account of each of the themes arising from the data. Tables are provided showing the number of occurrences and distribution of recurring topics by data set.

#### 4.2 Open Coding

Open coding of the data sets (Holton 2010; Pace 2012) began with a search for significant concepts (Holton 2010; Pace 2012). All six data sets were coded in order to highlight concepts using similar techniques to those illustrated by Pace (2012). The open coding stage corresponded to Chang's (2008) first four Analysis and Interpretation Strategies where significant concepts are referred to as recurring topics. Some of the topics were suggested by the research question ('othering' and scapegoating) and preconceptions regarding the proprietary industry (for example the institutional pressure and questionable practices addressed in the literature review above). Other topics, for example a sense of unfairness and lack of control over outcomes for which one is held accountable, arose from repeated occurrence in the data themselves. **Table 6** shows a break down of recurring topics/significant concepts, their distribution throughout the data sets and the total numbers of occurrences. The 'othering' column was divided into "*othering myself*" and "*being othered*" as it became apparent during this coding stage that the perception that I was "*the other*" was in some cases, not a result of any action on the part of my interlocutors but rather a sense of 'otherness' that I carried with me to the encounters. This theme will be expanded below and is also discussed in the theoretical memoing to be found in Appendix E.

What is immediately evident from the table below is that the salient themes are a perception of lack of control over outcomes for which one is held accountable, together with institutional pressure. Other topics occur less frequently which suggests that the resultant theory may not be as closely related to 'othering' and scapegoating as originally

anticipated. This is to be expected, as despite analytical autoethnography (in conjunction with grounded theory) permitting the researcher to generate theory (Pace 2012) the eventual outcomes are still subject to emergent themes (Chang 2008; Lincoln and Guba 1985). These themes can be anticipated to an extent, but not predicted with certainty.

**Table 6 – Number of Occurrences of Recurring Topics By Data Set**

| <b>Significant Concepts/Recurring Topics</b> |                            |                          |                     |                       |                   |                                   |                                   |
|--|----------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <b>DATA SET</b>                              | <b>Othering<br/>Myself</b> | <b>Being<br/>Othered</b> | <b>Scapegoating</b> | <b>No<br/>Control</b> | <b>Unfairness</b> | <b>Institutional<br/>Pressure</b> | <b>Questionable<br/>Practices</b> |
| <b>1. First Day</b>                          | 7                          | 0                        | 0                   | 0                     | 0                 | 0                                 | 0                                 |
| <b>2. Othered</b>                            | 1                          | 1                        | 1                   | 0                     | 0                 | 1                                 | 0                                 |
| <b>3. Emails</b>                             | 1                          | 0                        | 0                   | 3                     | 3                 | 5                                 | 2                                 |
|  | 0                          | 0                        | 3                   | 0                     | 0                 | 3                                 | 3                                 |
|  | 1                          | 0                        | 2                   | 3                     | 1                 | 1                                 | 2                                 |
|  | 0                          | 0                        | 7                   | 0                     | 1                 | 5                                 | 0                                 |
|  | 0                          | 0                        | 0                   | 0                     | 0                 | 0                                 | 0                                 |
|  | 0                          | 0                        | 0                   | 6                     | 2                 | 0                                 | 0                                 |
| <b>4. Interviews</b>                         | 0                          | 0                        | 4                   | 2                     | 2                 | 3                                 | 0                                 |
|  | 0                          | 0                        | 0                   | 2                     | 1                 | 0                                 | 0                                 |
|  | 0                          | 0                        | 0                   | 6                     | 2                 | 2                                 | 0                                 |
|  | 0                          | 0                        | 2                   | 4                     | 1                 | 4                                 | 0                                 |
|  | 0                          | 0                        | 1                   | 4                     | 2                 | 2                                 | 0                                 |
|  | 0                          | 0                        | 0                   | 2                     | 1                 | 2                                 | 0                                 |
| <b>5. Resignation</b>                        | 0                          | 0                        | 2                   | 3                     | 2                 | 7                                 | 5                                 |
| <b>6. Journal</b>                            | 0                          | 0                        | 0                   | 0                     | 0                 | 0                                 | 1                                 |
|  | 0                          | 0                        | 0                   | 0                     | 0                 | 0                                 | 0                                 |
|  | 0                          | 0                        | 0                   | 0                     | 0                 | 0                                 | 1                                 |
|  | 0                          | 0                        | 0                   | 0                     | 0                 | 0                                 | 0                                 |
|  | 0                          | 1                        | 0                   | 0                     | 0                 | 0                                 | 2                                 |
|  | 0                          | 0                        | 0                   | 0                     | 0                 | 0                                 | 0                                 |
|  | 0                          | 0                        | 0                   | 0                     | 0                 | 0                                 | 2                                 |
|  | 0                          | 0                        | 0                   | 0                     | 0                 | 0                                 | 0                                 |
|  | 0                          | 0                        | 0                   | 0                     | 0                 | 0                                 | 0                                 |
|  | 0                          | 0                        | 0                   | 0                     | 0                 | 0                                 | 0                                 |
| <b>TOTALS:</b>                               | <b>10</b>                  | <b>2</b>                 | <b>22</b>           | <b>35</b>             | <b>18</b>         | <b>35</b>                         | <b>19</b>                         |

#### *4.2.1 Description of Open Coding*

As shown in **Table 6** (above) seven recurring topics were identified. The table shows the frequency with which each of the above topics occurred.

They were:

**1. Being ‘othered’/perceiving myself as ‘the other’:** examples of ‘othering’ in the data appear to fall into three distinct categories. The researcher perceives herself as ‘the other’ (Laubscher and Powell 2003; Short 2010) the researcher is ‘othered’ (MacQuarrie 2010;

Palfreyman 2005) and the researcher effectively others herself by the deliberate act of distancing herself from her interlocutors (Laubscher and Powell 2003; Palfreyman 2005). In Data Set 1 (see p. 10 above) where the researcher describes her first day as Associate Dean, her complete lack of familiarity with the situation she encounters suggests intrusion into the cultural space of those already on campus (Laubscher and Powell 2003). This is evidenced by use of the following language to signify her lack of preparedness and surprise:

*“Nothing could have prepared me ...”*

*“ A student body unlike any I had previously worked with.”*

*“Challenges I had never had to face ...”*

*“I worked hard to conceal my surprise ...”*

(Data Set 1, see p. 10 above)

There is no evidence in Data Set 1 of the researcher being ‘othered’ by those around her. She nevertheless clearly perceives herself as ‘the other’. This is implicit in her own use of language *“I tried to remain phlegmatic (in the best ‘British’ tradition)”* (p. 11 above) and her observation that the students had *“grubby attire”*. Referring to British traditions and stereotypical reactions of stoicism, suggests a deliberate choice to distance herself on grounds of ethnicity (Palfreyman 2005). Remarks about student clothing, though not intentionally unkind (she does after all assume they are too poor to own a washing machine) nevertheless imply that the researcher perceives herself as having privileged status (Laubscher and Powell 2003).

Data Set 2 (p. 44, above) introduces the theme of being ‘othered’ in a pejorative way by a superior within the corporate structure. The suggestion that the researcher is less effective in her work because of her foreign accent is evidence of a negative assumption on the part of a member of the dominant culture (MacQuarrie 2010; Palfreyman 2005). The researcher’s outraged response creates a “them and us” situation and potential conflict (Palfreyman 2005). The fact that the Regional Vice President’s remarks are probably the product of ignorance, rather than a deliberate intention to offend, does not diminish the negative impact (MacQuarrie 2010). It is, however, the only example of being ‘othered’ in this discriminatory way. Conversely, there are several examples of the researcher ‘othering’ herself in an apparently purposeful manner by making deliberate lexical choices

that create distance between her and her interlocutors. Inherent in this behaviour is a suggestion that she is trying to establish a sense of self and distinguish between “me” and “not me” (MacQuarrie 2010) thus distancing herself not only from those she works with but also from the work-related practices of those she reports to. Examples of ‘othering’ herself include references to academic research (Data Set 2) when she knows that her superior is a businessman rather than an academic. Such behaviour could be interpreted as a desire to intimidate her interlocutor. Another example is the use of pompous language or words more common to British than American English (Data Set 3, Appendix A) implying a desire to reinforce her Britishness and effectively creating a barrier between her and those she is corresponding with.

The later data sets (4, 5 and 6) show little evidence of ‘othering’. This trend away from the concept of ‘othering’ as the chronological order of the data unfolds is discussed in Chapter 5.

In summary, ‘othering’ in the data can be divided into three distinct categories. They are: *perceiving oneself as ‘other’*, *‘being othered’* and *‘othering’ oneself*. There is only one clear example of being ‘othered’, whereas the perception of oneself as ‘other’ and ‘othering’ oneself through deliberate choice of language occur more frequently.

**2. Scapegoating:** there are references throughout the data to the expectation that staff (including the researcher herself) will be held accountable for campus outcomes. The threatening manner in which these expectations are conveyed to subordinates certainly suggests that the splitting and projection of unbearable feelings (Dunning, James and Jones 2005), which can culminate in scapegoating occurs frequently. Instances of actual scapegoating in the data are implied, not explicit. In Data Set 3, Email 2 (Appendix A) the statement relating to the Admissions Department “*We commented to each other that at least one staff member would disappear every month*” conveys the collective suspicion that admissions representatives are scapegoated regularly as a consequence of failing to meet enrolment targets. There is also an indication that the academic department seeks to defend its own failures by re-directing the blame towards colleagues in other departments who purportedly enrol unsuitable candidates. One might construe this behaviour as the splitting and projecting of unprocessed negativity (Dunning, James and Jones 2005). It is illustrated by an email from the autoethnographer to the campus Director of Admissions:

*“I’m perplexed by Maria’s situation. In her file, which we have just received, under ‘Transportation Plan’, there is a blank space and under ‘Back-up Plan’ she wrote, “I have a car but no job to pay gas”. It seems she had neither a plan (for getting to class), nor a viable back up and now she is a drop. She mentions only her boyfriend under the question regarding investment in education and intimates that he will help her make payments. As we know, he is not in a position to do so. I personally would have considered this to be a ‘drop waiting to happen’ and would have asked her to return when she actually had transportation. Perhaps you could discuss this with the rep who enrolled her?” (Data Set 3, Email 2, Appendix A)*

There is an obvious undertone of resentment in this email. Both parties understand that the academic department will be held accountable for this drop. The researcher, in her capacity as Academic Dean, chooses to blame her colleagues in the admissions department for this incident by pointing out deficiencies in the admissions process. She contends that a student with no apparent means of travelling to class has been permitted to enrol, thus deflecting the responsibility for the student’s departure away from herself. This indicates an inability to process unbearable feelings resulting in the retransmission of negativity towards co-workers.

Many of the incidents coded as ‘scapegoating’ in the data, could be broadly categorised as apportioning blame (itself a feature of splitting and projecting) rather than actual scapegoating (Krantz 2001; Obholzer and Roberts 1994). For example, in Data Set 2, the researcher comments that she expects her colleague in the Career Services Department to be subjected *“to a grilling”* indicating an assumption on her part that those who do not meet corporate targets will face negative consequences. In Data Set 5 (Appendix A), the researcher claims that her entire academic team has been held accountable for failing to reach retention targets that were unreasonable. The implication is that when desired outcomes are not met, the company seeks to blame the staff. Email 4 (Data Set 3, Appendix A) illustrates this well. The Regional Vice President directs Academic Deans at a number of failing campuses to send her photographs of an updated “Attrition Board”. The researcher, in her capacity as dean, understands that this board is used to shame faculty members by placing individual attrition statistics on public display. The photograph is evidence that the task has been carried out according to instructions.

The researcher asks whether she herself has been scapegoated. There are certainly claims in her letter of resignation (Data Set 5, see p. 93 below) that she has been the recipient of unbearable feelings (Dunning, James and Jones 2005) in the form of threats and unreasonable demands resulting in a stressful work environment, therefore scapegoating is a possibility. This is discussed further in Chapter 5 below.

**3. Having no control over corporate targets for which one is held accountable:** there are examples in the data of staff members perceiving that they have limited control over events for which they are held accountable, such as circumstances leading to student attrition. Faculty members in particular make frequent mention of this. The way in which the concept of lack of control interrelates to other concepts is discussed in detail in 4.3.1 below. However, it is noted here that the word ‘control’ is used repeatedly and noticeably by faculty members throughout the transcribed interview data (see Appendix A) generally in response to a question about how faculty performance is evaluated by the corporation. For example:

*“It is beyond our control.”* (Josh)

*“I can’t control people’s life circumstances.”* (Andrea)

*“there are so many circumstances where the teacher has no control.”* (Joan)

*“there are a plethora of reasons...the instructor has no control over.”* (Joan)

*“As far as I know, I have no control over money issues, I can’t help them with that ...”* (Joan)

*“If you got a disease and you’re in the hospital, I can’t control that or you go into premature labor, I can’t control that.”* (Kristen)

*“There are some things that are completely out of my hands that I can’t control the outcome of.”* (Alex)

*“I don’t have any control over their personal life or their health or their family issues so I’m frustrated because I don’t have any control over that.”* (Cindy)

Every faculty member interviewed mentions concerns relating to (lack of) control in relation to job performance, sometimes using alternative expressions such as *“My hands are tied”* (Alex). Clearly, this is a critical issue and one that the researcher herself is seen fretting over in the data, hence her supervisor’s advice in Data Set 3 (Email 3, Appendix A) to *“stop getting frustrated at the wrong things”* (that is, things she cannot control).

**4. Unfair treatment of faculty and staff by employer:** another recurring theme throughout the faculty interviews is that of unfair treatment. All six teachers interviewed claim it is unfair to hold them accountable for student attrition. The concept of unfairness is closely related to that of limited control. Being held accountable for circumstances over which they have no control, and which may eventually prompt a student to leave school, is particularly troubling. Faculty data is discussed in greater detail below (see Section 4.3.1) However, the topic of unfairness also occurs in other data sets, for example, the emails related to student retention where there are repeated references to unattainable performance targets.

In Email 1 the researcher writes to the College President describing circumstances which she obviously feels are beyond her control that have caused students to drop out of school (for example bereavement). She complains that all colleges have been set the same retention targets with little regard for relevant variables (such as differences between campus locations, programme offerings or catchment area). She concludes by saying:

*“While it is more than reasonable to demand discernible improvement, it is neither reasonable, nor motivating to set seemingly unattainable targets.”*

A similar sense of grievance is expressed in Email 3 over a change in corporate policy that has made it impossible to cancel (‘reverse’) the enrolment of an unqualified student unless the error is discovered within the first two weeks:

*“Obviously the potential 40 drops we will suffer on an annual basis as a result of changes to the time limit for reversals is insignificant. (I am not being facetious. I am utterly dismayed.)”*

The researcher is not being facetious, but she is being sarcastic, as both parties undoubtedly realise that losing another 40 students is a very serious matter in terms of lost revenue. Email 4 which concerns ways in which managers are directed to handle faculty who are not meeting individual retention targets includes the epitome of unfairness in the autoethnographer’s view - a target which is not simply challenging, but actually impossible to meet. An email from the Regional Vice President instructs academic deans to treat faculty as if they are “*underperforming admissions reps*” by setting them attrition



“*run rates*”. The term run rate is used in the admissions department to indicate the pace at which an admissions representative is expected to meet his/her total enrolment target for the month. In other words, a run rate represents a total number that increases as the month’s end approaches. Faculty have no way of increasing student numbers after a term has started and enrolments for the classes they are teaching have stopped. Therefore, logically, setting them increased retention targets could not work. The best they could hope for is that retention remains static. Proposing that teachers be treated in a similar fashion to admissions representatives is in this instance unworkable and therefore unfair.

In Email 6, the researcher writes to the Corporate Retention Manager acknowledging the fact that discernible improvement in overall student retention is a fair expectation but that the actual targets set for the campus are “*unrealistic and unreasonable*”. This theme of unfair demands being placed upon staff and faculty permeates the data.

**5. Institutional pressure applied to staff and faculty:** Three distinct types of institutional pressure are discernible in the data. There is the pressure applied by corporate managers to campus managers, the pressure applied by campus managers to campus staff and the pressure applied by campus staff to students.

Data Sets 2, 3, 4 and 5 all give examples of institutional pressure applied to staff. Indeed the primary focus of Data Set 5 (The Resignation Letter I never Sent, see Section 4.4 below) appears to be institutional pressure and stress, of which there are seven examples. These examples range from a general introductory statement about management at all levels creating “*such duress for my team and me that the excessive stress has had a detrimental effect on my health*” to more specific incidents. For example, a corporate decision to remove entrance testing is likely to create additional work for teachers who will need to provide remedial instruction for students unable to read proficiently. Staff and faculty assume this is a cynical ploy to admit more students who might otherwise have failed the entrance test and been refused admission. Data Set 3 (emails relating to student retention) contains a number of references to implied institutional pressure applied by various parties to other (subordinate) parties. Email 1 contains the following introductory statement:

*“The most frequent source of stress was the disproportionate amount of time I had to devote to scrutinizing student retention/attrition numbers and reporting to my supervisor and others in management positions throughout the company on a daily basis.”*

The above remarks set the tone for remainder of the emails where “pressure” “stress” and “duress” are mentioned repeatedly, most frequently in relation to meeting corporate targets.

Institutional pressure is implied, rather than explicitly described, on a number of occasions. The introduction to Email 2 suggests that *“The Admissions Department appeared to be under enormous pressure to meet enrolment targets”* although no direct evidence of this is offered. This assumption, however, explains why admissions representatives would enrol seemingly unsuitable candidates into certain programmes with the expectation that the academic team will support them. The assumption is supported by high turnover in admissions staff, presumably provoking anxiety in those remaining who do not wish to lose their jobs.

The suggestion that pressure is applied to students, for example to return to school, is apparent in the description of ‘Repeat offenders’ (Email1). These are students who have been absent from class but are *“tracked down”* by whatever (legal) means possible *“and persuaded to return, only to go missing again”*. That they are ‘persuaded’ to return is troubling. That they ‘go missing again’ implies that they did not wish to return in the first place. The outcome, in each case, is a short-term gain for the campus in terms of overall student retention, but a likely loss for the student who would be charged additional tuition fees for a brief re-appearance in the classroom.

Email 4 which describes the aforementioned *“attrition board”* and unattainable *“run rates”* offers an example of institutional pressure applied by a corporate manager to a campus manager (in this case the Academic Dean) who in turn is expected to apply pressure to faculty to perform in a certain way. This represents system wide institutional stress (Dunning, James and Jones 2005) beginning at the top and permeating the entire organisation.

**6. Questionable practices:** Questionable practices, for the purposes of the present study, are behaviours that, although legal, cause one to question whether they are in the students' best interests (Kutz 2010). There are relatively few examples of regulatory non-compliance in the data and the persons responsible appear to have been acting alone. There is no evidence that pressure was applied to these individuals to break the law. In one case, however, that of alleged inconsistencies in the reporting of placement data (data indicating the number of students who have obtained employment in their field as referenced in Data Set 5) the staff member in question would have been held accountable for finding suitable positions for graduates. Concerns about reaching her performance target (the percentage of students employed post-graduation) may have prompted her actions. In the second case (Data Set 6) there is speculation that a campus manager is dismissed for allegedly mis-using her position of influence. In the third and final case, a staff member, by her own admission, failed to follow correct procedures on documentation in support of her own academic appeal. The motivation for committing these acts was arguably personal gain and ultimately the perpetrators were the only ones who suffered as a result by losing their jobs. Therefore these acts are not representative of common behaviours and practices.

However, a number of practices of questionable status are reported in the data. Rather than isolated acts perpetrated by individuals, these behaviours are repeated by different staff members at different times and are therefore more likely to be endemic. These include enrolling students in programs for which they are not suited because, for example, they would be unable to pass the criminal background check required to enter the associated profession (Email 3) and enrolling students who have no means of transport and are therefore unlikely to attend classes regularly (Email 2). Though neither category of student would be denied the opportunity to enrol per the regulations, one has to question the admission of candidates who arguably appear destined for failure. These students, in the view of the academic department, were "*drop(s) waiting to happen*" (Data Set 3, Email 2). Other questionable practices occurred in the academic department under the supervision of the researcher. She complains in her letter of resignation about being expected to register students starting at the mid-term in more courses than she feels they can reasonably manage. There is also a suspicion that absent students are pressured to return to class when it may not be in their best interests and will undoubtedly increase their debt.

Following the coding for recurring topics/significant concepts, data were scrutinised for cultural themes (Chang 2008). A cultural theme is defined as “*a postulate or position, declared or implied, and usually controlling behavior or stimulating activity*” (McCurdy, Spradley and Shandy 2005, p. 79). Potential cultural themes identified included the following:

1) It is important for students to complete their programmes (*mentioned or implied 20 times*).

The emphasis on student retention within the proprietary industry suggests more than a cynical desire to increase revenue. There is an obvious connection between students remaining in college and actually graduating from their programmes. Students who graduate are more likely to become employed in their chosen field (U.S. Department of Education 2014). In this respect the needs of the industry are reconcilable to the needs of students. Students completing programmes and becoming employed is of critical importance to the students themselves and reflects positively on the institutions from which they graduate, therefore it is important for students to complete. Implicit in this theme is the suggestion that American society values education (Duncan 1963).

2) Obtaining an education is more challenging if you are poor (9 times).

There are frequent references in the data to students experiencing financial difficulties. The researcher is exposed to student poverty in Data Set 1 (p. 10 above) when she encounters students who are poorly dressed and have no money for bus fare home. In Data Set 3 (Email 2) a student who cannot afford to put petrol in her car and needs help paying tuition drops out of school. A faculty member (Joan) makes specific reference to money issues over which she has no control (see p. 79, above). More than 50 percent of proprietary school students live below the national poverty line (see p. 21, above) and one of the major concerns expressed by the U.S. Secretary of Education regarding for-profit vocational schools is that students will be in a worse financial predicament after enrolling in a proprietary college than before (U.S. Department of Education 2014). The theme of poverty as an obstacle to success in college is reinforced by nine appearances in the data.

3) It is unfair to hold faculty and staff accountable for student outcomes they cannot control (43 times).

Theme 3 “*It is unfair to hold faculty and staff accountable for student outcomes they cannot control*” was mentioned or implied in the data more frequently than all the other cultural themes combined. Coupled with the high frequency of “*having no control over corporate targets such as student attrition*” which was identified as a recurring topic, the perception of lack of control is emerging as a major concept and when viewed in the light of Williams’ definition of workplace stress (2003, see p. 35 above) suggests that a connection exists between feeling powerless and perceiving that one is working under duress.

In accordance with Chang’s aforementioned Analytic Strategies (see p. 67 above) the data were further scrutinised for exceptional occurrences. The following incidents fell into this category:

**Table 7 – Exceptional Occurrences by Data Set**

| <u>Data Set</u> | <u>Participants</u>            | <u>Description of Incident</u>  |
|-----------------|--------------------------------|---|
| 1               | Myself/Dean/Students           | <i>My first encounter with members of the student body at my new place of employment is shocking.</i> |
| 2               | Myself/Regional Vice President | <i>I am shocked to learn that I am considered “too academic” for my Position as Academic Dean</i>     |
| 3               | Myself                         | <i>I decide to resign from my job.</i>  |
| 4               | Myself/Campus President        | <i>I report alleged inconsistencies in placement data.</i>  |

- |    |                       |   |
|----|-----------------------|---|
| 5  | Supervisor/co-workers | <i>My supervisor is dismissed for alleged regulatory offences</i> |
| 6. |                       | <i>A co-worker is dismissed for failing to follow procedures.</i> |

The initial reaction to the above exceptional occurrences is that they are limited in number. Chang claims that identifying such occurrences can “*provide tremendously useful information on self*” (2008, p. 133) and it is true that in very general terms, the sequence of events above, suggests a progressive change of focus from the researcher herself to the actions of others. For example, the first three exceptional occurrences relate to the author’s reaction of shock when she encounters an unexpectedly at-risk student body in her first job on a proprietary campus, her perception of being ‘othered’ by accent and her decision to resign, while the last three exceptional occurrences all focus on transgressions allegedly committed by colleagues. This trend away from the self and towards a focus on the community is in keeping with the autoethnographic requirement of using self as a springboard to theorise about society (Anderson 2006; Mykhalovskiy 1996; Sparkes 1996).

The final analytic strategy corresponding to the open coding stage of grounded theory is the analysis of inclusions and omissions. It is apparent from Data Set 3 onwards that there is little evidence of the ‘othering’ that was such a major concern initially. Also, the examples of scapegoating do not illustrate the researcher being personally scapegoated but rather being targeted collectively along with her colleagues. There are no reservations expressed in the data about the morality of selling education at a profit to low-income students. (Is this omission the result of the researcher not asking the question directly of the faculty she interviewed, or is it that it is simply not a concern?) There are, however, frequent examples of institutional pressure being applied to staff and various instances of questionable practices as the implied result of that pressure. As for inclusions, as mentioned above, there is frequent mention in the data of perceived lack of control over student attrition, and institutional pressure to meet targets. There is also evidence that the researcher, far from being ‘othered’, has integrated herself into campus society (see, for example Data Set 2 where I state that I was doing well in terms of meeting my targets) and, despite protestation is participating in the splitting and projecting of unbearable feelings

by instructing her staff to respond to corporate directives. These themes will be discussed later in this chapter.

In summary, the data were coded using a combination of the strategies proposed by Chang (2008) and Pace (2012). A search for recurring topics (Chang 2008) and significant concepts (Pace 2012) was conducted. The frequency and distribution of recurring topics throughout the data was tabulated. Further searches were conducted for cultural themes and exceptional occurrences (Chang 2008) and outcomes were tabulated. Finally the data were analysed for apparent inclusions and omissions.

### **4.3 Theoretical Coding**

The second stage of grounded theory is theoretical coding. It entails comparing themes (Holton 2010) and searching for the causal influence of one concept upon another (Pace 2012). If the aim of constructing theory in relation to the proprietary industry is to be achieved, it is important to present themes as a series of interrelated concepts rather than isolated topics (Strauss and Corbin 1998, p. 145). The coded data were therefore examined in order to determine how the concepts (recurring topics, significant concepts and cultural themes) related to each other.

The recurring topic/significant concept of institutional pressure appears to be interrelated with every other recurring topic and significant concept with the exception of being 'othered'. Examples of institutional pressure leading to perceptions of lack of control, unfair treatment, scapegoating or questionable practices are present in Data Sets 2, 3, 4 and 5 (see Appendix A). The only data sets where institutional pressure is not prevalent are numbers 1 and 6. In Data Set 1, a complete lack of familiarity with the proprietary industry precludes any awareness of institutional pressure. In Data Set 6, it appears that, exceptionally, the impetus to commit questionable acts comes from personal motivation rather than external pressure to meet corporate targets. Data Set 4 (interviews with faculty members) is perhaps most interesting as it illustrates how this pressure is perceived by other participants thereby extending the concept beyond the autoethnographer to others of similarity (Chang 2008) within the campus community.

#### 4.3.1 Examples of Theoretical Coding

Transcribed interviews with six faculty members can be found in Appendix A. The extracts below are examples of the theoretical coding stage of the research. None of the instructors specifically names the concept of institutional pressure. Nevertheless there is a clear expectation that each instructor will meet student retention targets. This expectation is mentioned frequently (in conjunction with a perceived limited ability to influence retention) thus implying that pressure is applied as extrinsic motivation to perform to a certain level. “Alex” (male, 20s) says the following:

*“I ... my perception is ... it’s, it’s that, at the core, at the base that’s what I’m hired to do. That’s the job I’m hired to perform, but it’s also to serve the interests of the school as a business by keeping students, by keeping their attrition rates as low as they possibly can ... and doing what I can to work in that direction. So it’s a weird juggling act; which is more important, do I spend all my time calling students and getting them back in the classroom, or preparing classes and grading the papers I have each week? It becomes a struggle sometimes.”*

His initial comments suggest that he is resigned to meeting retention targets (*“that’s what I’m hired to do”*). However, he refers to his situation as a *“weird juggling act”* and *“a struggle”* implying that it feels neither easy nor natural. We infer that the need to “juggle” teaching and retention duties is imposed upon him in order to *“serve the needs of the school as a business”* hence the theoretically coded concept of institutional pressure. Later in the interview Alex is more explicit:

*“I understand the logic behind it but I think the reality of it is more unfortunate because I can control what I do in my classroom, what kind of work my students do and how to present my lessons but retention I feel it’s like a roll of the dice. There are some things that are completely out of my hands that I can’t control the outcome of. Students drop out for a variety of reasons which, either it’s none of my business or I can’t affect change positively or negatively on them. My hands are tied. It’s just an area where I feel more helpless.”*

Again, he is resigned to the *“logic behind it”* (retention targets) but he feels he has no control over whether students stay in college or drop out. He draws a parallel between



trying to retain certain students with specific (personal) problems and a game of chance (“*I feel it’s like a roll of the dice*”).

When he is asked to explain why the majority of students leave, his frustration at the corporation’s directive to “*get our numbers up*” is apparent:

*“Or things just happen in their lives; someone’s been incarcerated, some have been made homeless and school has to take a back seat to family issues and other issues in their lives. School has to be in the back seat. And what can we do about it? “You have a sick kid, you have a kid in the hospital? Well, never mind that. Come to school and sit in class so we can get our numbers up. It just becomes this absurd, absurd gambit.”*

And finally he rails against the perceived unfairness of it:

*“If it’s strictly a numbers thing, well you lost six students, well does it matter that three are incarcerated, two are homeless and one of them moved to Arizona? No it doesn’t matter what the reason is. You lost six. That counts against you. I don’t think that’s fair or reasonable at all. It’s not fair if I can’t affect the outcome of it. It’s totally out of my hands but I’m still being held accountable. If there’s nothing I can do to change it then that’s not ...”*

In the extracts from Alex’s interview above several recurring topics/significant themes interact with each other. There is a sense that pressure from the institution to meet retention targets leads to faculty members being unfairly adjudicated given the limited control they perceive they have over students’ individual circumstances. The interplay between the recurring topics of unfair treatment, lack of control and institutional pressure is evident. Kristen (female, 20s) reiterates Alex’s points first by recognizing what she perceives to be her responsibility as an instructor:

*“Yes. I would think that they agree that the main responsibility obviously is the teaching and the quality of education but also I do know that for example with retention and losing students I know that that’s very important and that is also part of the instructor’s responsibility so you can’t lose sight of that.”*

Kristen also accepts that student retention is, at least partly, her responsibility. However, she feels unable to influence many of the life challenges that prompt students to leave:

*“There’s, I think there’s definitely, there’s pros to it but I think there’s a lot of cons to it when you evaluate someone’s performance based on, for example the retention rate part of it just because there’s so many circumstances out there that cause a student to drop out and there’s no way that a teacher can be held responsible for some of those reasons. For example if someone is automatically dropped because they went to jail or because they died or they lost their job or they, I mean there’s only so much that an instructor can do to help each student especially when we’re responsible for so many, and it puts a lot of pressure on the teacher to try and track down these students who, maybe this wasn’t the best place for them and I think that takes away from helping students that really could use the time because we’re spending so much time on students that we’re responsible for saving but in – realistically – we have no control whether we can save them or not.”*

Unlike Alex, Kristen refers directly to “*pressure*” placed on faculty to retain students. Although she does not actually confirm the source of the pressure, it is reasonable to surmise from her remarks about her performance being evaluated, that she means the institution that has set the goals. Again, there is evidence here that institutional pressure leads to unfair treatment (in terms of unattainable performance targets) based on criteria that she feels she has no chance of influencing.

Whereas Alex and Kristen appear to hold the corporation responsible for placing them under duress, Cindy (female, 60s) sees campus managers as complicit in holding teachers accountable for unreasonable targets. In the following exchange she answers a question about her main responsibility as an instructor:

**Cindy:** *To prepare the students for the jobs that they are seeking and to give them the knowledge and the confidence to do that.*

**Helen:** *Okay thanks. Does your employer also see that as your main responsibility?*

**Cindy:** *Somewhat. Um, most of the time yes and there's some circumstances where um there might not be a lot of support if the student is um a little bit outside the norm.*

**Helen:** *And why do you think that is?*

**Cindy:** *Because of the responsibility the administrator has toward the company rather than um supporting ... supporting me.*

She clearly finds the pressure to retain students untenable:

*"I don't have any control over their personal life or their health or their family issues so I'm frustrated because I don't have any control over that."*

She also feels that she is being treated unfairly:

*"I don't think it's fair at all. There's a great amount of stress for us instructors and I think that takes away our focus on doing a good job in the classroom."*

With all three instructors, we see that the recurring topics of lack of control, unfair treatment and institutional pressure identified during the open coding stage of data analysis, are intertwined, and causal effects (such as institutional pressure and lack of control resulting in unfair treatment) are apparent.

Chang (2008) also calls for an examination of interrelationships at this stage in the analytical process. However, rather than determining how concepts relate to each other per se, she proposes an investigation of how self relates to others and how the autoethnographer's situation compares with other people's. This strategy, she contends, brings "*difference and commonality to your consciousness and further understanding of self*" (p. 136).

**Table 8** (over) shows who those others are and which elements bind them together and/or separate them:

**Table 8 - Others of Similarity: What Binds Us Together?**

|                 | Work Environment                    | Educational Background              | Concern for Students                | Subjected to Institutional Pressure | Perception of lack of control       | Sense of Unfairness                 | Belief in For-profit Education      |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Faculty Members | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Self            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/>            |

The first three columns in **Table 8** demonstrate how the autoethnographer and faculty members with whom she works are ‘others of similarity’ because they work together, are all educated to college level and (it is reasonable to suppose) are concerned for students’ welfare and success. Both parties are also ‘others of similarity’ because they share similar experiences in the proprietary workplace. As already demonstrated by the email extracts in Data Set 3 and the interview data from Data Set 4, both the researcher and her faculty co-workers express consternation at the apparent unfairness of being held accountable for circumstances beyond their control. This suggests that far from being ‘othered’, as initially suspected, the autoethnographer is actually sharing the burden of institutional pressure with her colleagues. She does, however, differ in a fundamental way, and that is a lack of belief in education as a marketable commodity. In this respect the researcher and her colleagues are ‘others of difference’ because they represent different “*communities of practices, sets of values and identities*” (Chang, p. 134). This will be explored further in the discussion chapter below.

To summarise, the second phase of grounded theory analysis is theoretical coding. The data sets were coded theoretically by taking the recurring topics and significant concepts from the open coding phase and examining the relationships between them. The researcher looked specifically for causal influence of one concept upon another (Holton 2010; Pace 2012). Institutional pressure appears to have had a causal influence on four of the other five recurring topics. Examples of the causal influence of institutional pressure were taken from Data Set 4 (faculty interviews). These examples illustrated how, rather than being ‘othered’, the author shared her experiences of institutional pressure with ‘others of similarity’ (her colleagues) thus moving the autoethnography out of the personal realm and into the communal. Finally the data were analysed for evidence of how self related to

others and the results presented in **Table 7** which showed that self had a number of circumstances and perceptions in common with her ‘others of similarity’ and only differed in terms of her lack of belief in for-profit education.

#### **4.4 Selective Coding of Data**

Selective coding is the phase of grounded theory during which codes are “*delimited to only those concepts that relate to a core explanatory concept*” (Pace 2012, p. 12). This core concept represents the main theme to emerge from the study. For Chang (2008) the final stage of analysis prior to writing theory entails contextualization. Both scientists’ strategies are compatible in that Chang’s process of “*contextualizing broadly*”(p. 136) should facilitate the delimitation described by Pace. This point can be illustrated by using examples from Data Set 5 comprising two letters of resignation. The first is a letter composed by the researcher in which her reasons for resigning are detailed:

##### **Data Set 5**

##### **The Resignation Letter I Never Sent**

*February 27, 2011*

*Dear Ms. Parkinson,*

*It is with regret that I feel compelled to tender my resignation as Academic Dean.*

*As I feel I can still be of service to the campus and am willing to devote time and energy to resolving certain regulatory matters and preparing to hand over to my eventual successor, I am offering to work one month’s notice. Therefore, my final day of employment will be March 31 2011.*

*I am copying this letter of resignation to the regional Human Resources Department and Regional Vice President of Operations, Daniel Dodgson, as I believe it is important to make the reasons for my resignation known.*

*I recognize that an important position such as Dean of a proprietary campus is bound to carry with it attendant pressures. I have worked under such pressure for more than 9 years in my roles of Associate Dean and Academic Dean. However, since Jennifer*

*Johnson retired, certain events on this campus related largely to the way in which we have been managed both regionally and at divisional level have created such duress for my team and me that the excessive stress has had a detrimental effect on my health.*

*These events include deliberate decisions such as the setting of attrition and retention targets with no regard for historical data or local circumstances while at the same time removing the student entrance tests that measure the minimal levels of literacy and numeracy required to be successful in college level courses. While expecting discernible improvement is more than reasonable, to ask a campus with an attrition budget of 5.8% (FY2009), and 5.5% (2010) to attain 3.6% in the current fiscal year is both unreasonable and demotivating. When this budget was set, unlike in previous years, input from the College President and Academic Dean was completely disregarded. The decision to give all campuses in the division the same target regardless of historical and physical circumstances or the number and nature (i.e. modular or linear) of the programs offered was described to me as “an experiment to see what happens”. (Linear programmes are traditional quarter-based courses lasting 12 weeks while modular programmes are intensive in nature. A comparison of campuses offering mainly one or the other suggested that students were more likely to complete the shorter courses. Thus modular campuses generally had better retention outcomes.)*

*I am dismayed to think that my staff and I have been victims of such an experiment that has created pressure and despondency in equal measure. A logical examination of the empirical data would suggest that the most fair and effective business decision would have been to expect the same degree of improvement that occurred between 2009 and 2010 where the campus went from 5.7% to 5.1%. Had we been asked to strive for a target of 4.5% this would have seemed entirely reasonable. Instead, even though we are (year to date) performing better than in 2010 (and this despite the disarray in our Admissions Department and a diminishing population owing to poor enrollment numbers), I have increasing pressure on me to “treat instructors like under performing admissions reps with run rates and the like . . .” This quotation is taken directly from an email I received from the former RVP. It is typical of frequent comments and remarks that display a lack of understanding of the linear, as opposed to modular, campus. 12 of our 14 programs are linear. Fewer than 10% of our students are in modular programs. We have one major*

*re-entry point every quarter and an extremely limited re-entry opportunity at the mid-term owing to restrictions on the number of courses we can offer. Setting instructors a run rate on a monthly basis would be patently absurd given that the population in their classes cannot increase once the ADD/DROP period is over. ('ADD/DROP' was a two-week period of time during which new students could enrol in a class or drop a class without charge.)*

*In my 9 years at the campus, we have introduced a number of new programs. These decisions, to the best of my knowledge were made at corporate headquarters with little or no consultation and in some cases against the advice of staff members including myself. Two such programs, the Computer Information Science and Business Degrees, have proved to be expensive to run, undersubscribed and a drain on resources. They have also presented severe retention challenges. Recent gainful employment concerns beg the question, "why are we not teaching these programs out?" (It was known at this point that the Obama Administration was planning to release regulations regarding the need for private career colleges to better prepare students for gainful employment or risk losing access to Federal Financial Aid. There were growing concerns over the number of students unable to find work or repay student loans. Legislation was actually passed in June 2011.)*

*The only new program to be introduced that can be described as successful is the Pharmacy Technician Diploma. It is successful mainly because we redesigned it at a local level and persuaded the corporation to permit us to reduce it to a manageable and financially viable 49 credits. Unfortunately this is an isolated instance of the campus voice being heard at the corporate level.*

*The decision to remove CPAT entrance testing was made in haste and is, in my opinion, to the detriment of the campus and prospective students. (CPAT stands for Career Programs Assessment Test. It includes tests of basic literacy, numeracy and reading ability.) I participated in a conference call where we were instructed to cease entrance testing and instead, use the CPAT as a 'placement' test. I will not repeat the text of the letter I wrote to Candy Smith about this decision in its entirety but suffice it to say that the CPAT is not a placement test and was not designed to be used as such. Also, the fatuous argument that "community colleges don't have entrance tests" should be qualified by adding, "but they do have a wide range of developmental courses and resources dedicated to placement*

*testing and advising”. We have one hard-working, part-time tutor who cannot possibly address the needs of all those students whose language and math skills do not reach the required minimum. I received no response to my letter of protest other than a one-line acknowledgement, which did not address any of my concerns.*

*Another ‘academic’ decision that is of great concern to me is that we are being compelled to increase campus revenue by scheduling all mid-term starts in 12 or more credits. I have been in education for more than 25 years as an instructor, teacher trainer and administrator. I have the expertise to make decisions regarding the academic welfare of my students. Given how vulnerable our mid-term starts prove to be, it is not in the interests of all but a very few to expect them to complete the equivalent of a full-time 12-week program in only six weeks. This is the equivalent of six hours per day, which exceeds the contact time of a modular program. There are many students for whom this is not a pedagogically sound decision and being asked to schedule students in such a way in order to resolve the campuses 90/10 challenges suggests that business interests are being placed before those of the students. (The college operated on a quarter system with terms starting four times per year in winter, spring, summer and autumn. New enrolments were admitted with every new term – unlike in a traditional college with new intake at the beginning of the academic year only. New students were also permitted to start in the middle of a quarter. By so doing they committed to doubling the number of class hours required per week in order to complete their courses by the end of the term. These intensive courses were not ideal for all students, particularly those with academic challenges. In order to lessen the burden on students who were mid-term starts, we would deliberately schedule them for fewer courses – two instead of three or four. This appeared to be working. However, when the corporation realised that it was in danger of violating the federal stipulation for at least 10% of its income to be cash revenue, it decided to resolve the problem by directing us to automatically schedule mid-term starts for more courses, and thereby increase their cash payments. This led to some students struggling to keep up with the intensive nature of the classes and either failing or withdrawing.)*

*The above issues regarding the academic calibre of students together with unreasonable and demoralizing retention targets are but two of many concerns. They are not the only reason why I consider my position to be untenable. Over the years I have been on the receiving end of what I consider to be verbal threats conveyed to me by successive college*



*presidents from regional management. They take the form of statements such as “You can’t go over 40 drops this month.” “Don’t you dare drop any more this month!” I once attended a presidents’ conference call where the RVP asked the question, “ If I told you that you have to make this target or else, what would you do?” My President responded that there was nothing else she could do. I have been told frequently of regional managements’ displeasure at the number of students we have dropped. I have always resisted breaking the rules in any way simply to meet targets but this kind of verbal bullying takes a toll on one’s mental health. It is also totally at variance with the tenets of the ‘positive reinforcement’ our instructors are required to utilise in the classroom. As a motivational technique, positive reinforcement is demonstrably effective. Why then is negative reinforcement used to manage us?*

*To compound my discomfort at working under significant duress, it has also been brought to my attention by present and former staff members in several departments that there have been certain inconsistencies with regard to the recording and reporting of graduate placement data. I will not elaborate here but will say that I have reported all pertinent information regarding these matters to LaToya Parkinson and do not know if they have been addressed or resolved. If we add to the above the arguably questionable practice of enrolling students with felonies into programs where their employment possibilities are extremely limited, the challenges appear insurmountable ...*

### **The Resignation Letter I Actually Sent**

*Dear Ms. Parkinson,*

*I hereby tender my resignation as of March 31<sup>st</sup> 2011.*

*Yours truly,*

Contextualisation of the above data begins the process whereby the researcher can demonstrate that *“to write individual experience is, at the same time, to write social experience”* (Mykhalovskiy 1996, p. 141). Shifting the focus from the individual context (the researcher’s personal employment situation) to the broader context of a proprietary campus and beyond that to the proprietary industry in order to explain and interpret observed behaviors and attitudes, can address the original research question regarding what an British educator’s personal experiences reveal about the industry as a whole. A proposed strategy for contextualization entails a metaphorical ‘zooming in’ for example on individual incidents, and ‘zooming out’ to consider the broader context and what specific details might tell us about the social environment in which these events occur (Chang 2008). Thus far, the most prevalent theme to emerge from both open and theoretical coding has been that of institutional pressure leading to perceptions of unfair treatment, lack of control over retention outcomes, questionable practices, and possible scapegoating. By ‘zooming in’ on individual experience as depicted in the data set and ‘zooming out’ to consider the wider implications for the campus and/or the proprietary industry we can formulate a theory in relation to institution pressure.

Near the beginning of the letter I introduce the topic of pressure:

*“I recognize that an important position such as Dean of a proprietary campus is bound to carry with it attendant pressures. I have worked under such pressure for more than 9 years...”*

There is an acknowledgement in the above statement that positions of responsibility are naturally demanding. However, the tenor of the argument changes immediately with the suggestion that an acceptable level of pressure has been transformed into *“duress”* and *“excessive stress”* since, and by implication possibly related to, the departure of the former college president. It should be noted that I am no longer writing about myself alone and have broadened the context to the entire academic department of the college (*“my team and me”*). The questionable practices referred to in the following paragraph (the setting of unreasonable retention targets and removal of student entrance tests) affect not only me as the manager in charge but the teachers and any students admitted to the college without the necessary literacy level to handle college level courses.

From this point on, all perceived pressure is applied collectively and not to me individually, for example *“I am dismayed to think that my staff and I have been victims of such an experiment”*. My initial sense of ‘othering’ has been subsumed into a shared perception of persecution of the team of which I am a member. On the one hand I distance myself from upper management by making deliberately pompous lexical choices (*“compelled to tender my resignation” “dismayed to think” “despondency in equal measure” “to the detriment of the campus”*) none of which are common in North American business English, while on the other hand I identify strongly with my colleagues and those I supervise by using the first person plural pronoun (*“we have introduced a number of new programs”, “we have one major re-entry point”, “we have one hard-working, part-time tutor”*). I defend both co-workers and students from apparent institutional pressure to engage in practices that in my view are inappropriate or damaging:

*“I have increasing pressure on me to ‘treat instructors like under performing admissions reps with run rates and the like ...”*

*“Setting instructors a run rate on a monthly basis would be patently absurd ...”*

*“Given how vulnerable our mid-term starts prove to be, it is not in the interests of all but a very few to expect them to complete the equivalent of a full-time 12-week program in only six weeks.”*

*“There are many students for whom this is not a pedagogically sound decision.”*

*“Business interests are being placed before those of the students.”*

The resignation letter I wrote, but did not send, represents the ‘big picture’ on the campus where I worked and (because the same policies applied to more than 100 campuses owned by the same corporation) by extension the entire organisation. It begins on a very personal note (*“I feel compelled to tender my resignation”, “I feel I can still be of service”*) but soon transforms into a description of the challenges facing the campus community of which I am a part and on whose behalf I appear to be speaking. I make a clear distinction between

corporate management to whom I attribute inappropriate policies and the campus staff to whom pressure is applied to implement these policies:

*“These decisions, to the best of my knowledge were made at corporate headquarters with little or no consultation and in some cases against the advice of staff members including myself.”*

Although I give a personal example of being bullied (*“Don’t you dare drop any more this month.”*), I also cite threatening behaviour displayed towards the Campus President (*“If I told you that you have to make this target or else, what would you do?”*), thus confirming that I do not consider myself to be the sole victim of this unacceptable treatment.

The above examples taken from Data Set 5 illustrate the repeated occurrence of the theme of institutional pressure in conjunction with other significant concepts and recurring topics such as questionable practices. They also illustrate how the autoethnographer can extrapolate theory relating to the broader context of the educational society of which she is a member.

During the selective coding phase which followed open and theoretical coding, institutional pressure and its relationship with other recurring topics and cultural themes emerged as a *“core explanatory concept”* (Pace 2012, p. 12). Theoretical memoing was then used to support the process of *“formulating theory for presentation to others”* (Glaser 1978, p. 116). In addition to theoretical memoing completed towards the latter stages, it was determined that the findings from an earlier draft of the research served a similar purpose to that of theoretical memoing and they were therefore incorporated into the memos to enrich the process (see Appendix E). The memos were then compared with each other in order to identify similarities and conceptual connections (Holton 2010; Pace 2012) and these conceptual orderings (Pace 2012) were used to formulate theory addressing the research question. The resultant theory was not expected to be a *“hard core ‘tested hypothesis’ in a scientific sense”* but rather *“a conjecture or postulate that explains a social phenomenon”* (Chang 2008, p. 137).

Selective coding and contextualisation were carried out in order to reduce codes (comprising recurring topics, cultural themes and significant concepts) to a “*core explanatory concept*” (Pace 2012). The letter of resignation (written but never submitted) provided examples of the fracturing and connecting necessary to relate the data to a broader context (Chang 2008). The examples illustrated the prevalence of institutional pressure, its relationship with other significant concepts such as questionable practices, and the extent to which the autoethnographer, rather than being ‘othered’, has become part of, and is speaking on behalf of a group of disgruntled staff on the campus (Obholzer and Roberts 1994, p. 132). Selective coding represents the final phase prior to “*writing theory*” (Pace 2012) or “*framing with theory*” (Chang 2008). This final phase will be described in the section below.

#### **4.5 Sorting Memos and Writing Theory**

Theoretical memos were first sorted by concept (see Appendix E). There were 21 pages of memos which, when divided into concepts came to 64 separate pieces. The concepts used for sorting were the recurring topics identified during the open coding process. These topics - alternatively described as significant concepts - were highlighted using the same colours as were used during open coding. The intention was to compare the memos with each other in order to find “*similarities, connections and conceptual orderings*” (Pace 2012, p. 13). Next the memos were re-sorted according to their relationships with other memos. For example in memo 26 (below) institutional pressure, perceived lack of control, scapegoating and ‘othering’ were all highlighted within the same paragraph and the researcher is beginning to explore the connections and causal effects of one upon the other:

**26)** *It’s starting to look less and less about me being ‘othered’. The major issues seem to be around institutional pressure and lack of control. I wonder how one exacerbates the other. If you feel you can’t control things – like attrition – do you opt out, leading to more pressure being applied to perform? What about the steady application of pressure creating a sense of lack of control? I should explore that. Being ‘othered’ appears to be my issue, but how does that impact my ability to do my job? At the end of the day we all feel the pressure and the lack of control. There is more evidence of scapegoating than ‘othering’ – that’s if you call apportioning blame scapegoating. They might call it being held accountable.*

Subsequent to sorting by relationships, a table was produced showing the number of times each concept was mentioned in conjunction with one of the others:

**Table 9 – Theoretical Memoing**

| <b>→</b>                      | <b>Othering</b> | <b>Scapegoating</b> | <b>No Control</b> | <b>Unfairness</b> | <b>Institutional Pressure</b> | <b>Quest' Practices</b> |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Othering</b>               |                 | 6                   | 1                 | 0                 | 1                             | 4                       |
| <b>Scapegoating</b>           | 6               |                     | 1                 | 0                 | 3                             | 0                       |
| <b>No Control</b>             | 1               | 1                   |                   | 0                 | 6                             | 3                       |
| <b>Unfairness</b>             | 0               | 0                   | 0                 |                   | 2                             | 2                       |
| <b>Institutional Pressure</b> | 1               | 3                   | 6                 | 2                 |                               | 11                      |
| <b>Questionable Practices</b> | 4               | 0                   | 3                 | 2                 | 11                            |                         |

The table above shows that institutional pressure appears 23 times in conjunction with one of the other concepts, most notably questionable practices. Questionable practices are mentioned 20 times in conjunction with other concepts, whereas unfairness occurs only four times in total. ‘Othering’ and scapegoating are mentioned six times in conjunction with each other, whereas unfairness does not occur in conjunction with ‘othering’, scapegoating or perceived lack of control at all. The most frequently collocated concepts are institutional pressure and questionable practices, which appear together 11 times. The sorting of memos supports the core explanatory concept and suggests a strong connection between institutional pressure and questionable practices. In order to formulate a theory related to institutional pressure and its relationship with other concepts, the memos will be referenced, and evidence from the coded data will be used. However, prior to discussing theory, key issues raised earlier in the study will be addressed in the discussion chapter below.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

#### 5.1 Introduction

The issues discussed below include the different kinds of self that emerge from the research, ‘othering’, the proprietary sector and the morality of selling education for profit, the dissonance of function, belief and ethic in the autoethnographer’s role as an educator and finally the core explanatory concept of institutional pressure. These issues arose prior to the coding of data and were addressed in the literature review. Each is now reconsidered in turn, in the light of the findings summarised in Chapter 4.

#### 5.2 ‘Othering’

The author’s perceived sense of ‘otherness’ is based on relatively superficial incidents suggesting cultural differences rather than systematic evidence of “*undesirable objectification*” or “*perpetuating prejudice*” (MacQuarrie 2010, p. 3). This is exemplified by the incident with the visiting Regional Vice President in Data Set 2 (‘Othered!’ p. 44 above) whose observation that a British accent might hinder communication with students implies ignorance on his part but does not illustrate a pattern of behaviour within the campus community. Indeed, the author confirms that most reactions to her accent are favourable and classifies the incident on p. 85 (above) as an “exceptional occurrence”. Of greater concern, perhaps, is what the RVP means by being “*too academic*”. Did the autoethnographer invite this criticism by referring to academic research during her conversation with him instead of focusing on the practicalities of her primary role as retention manager? Being “*too academic*” appears to mean that issues such as the quality of classroom instruction are of lesser consequence than retention outcomes. The autoethnographer initially perceives that she is ‘othered’, as the dynamic of the relationship between herself and the RVP reinforces a position of “*domination and subordination*” (Johnson et al. 2004, p. 253). However, this positioning within the corporate hierarchy is also common to her colleagues and supports the core concept of institutional pressure rather than providing evidence of ‘othering’.

Certain ways in which the author suspects ‘othering’ are not directly related to her nationality but instead derive from an unfamiliarity with context which is to be expected

with any employee who has not previously encountered proprietary education. For example, any person, regardless of nationality, who is new to the proprietary industry, would be unaware of the implications of retention in terms of revenue and performance. It is also probable that an educator from the public college system would not anticipate encountering the at-risk student demographic served by for-profit schools. While it is true that there are challenges related to adjusting to different workplace terms and conditions (longer hours, less time off) this is not an example of being ‘othered’ but rather a cultural difference that the researcher has carried with her to her new place of work. It could reasonably be supposed that had she been comfortable and happy in her position, these factors would have seemed less important. One possible exception is the researcher’s immigration status over which she initially has no control and which distinguishes her from co-workers in terms of job mobility. However, by the time she assumes her position on a for-profit campus, issues associated with this status have been resolved leaving residual resentment but no challenges of a practical nature.

The author effectively others herself in the way she chooses to communicate with management by using overtly formal language in email communications (Data Set 3) and referring to academic research in conversation with the Regional Vice President (Data Set 2). She is well aware of the business register generally used for communications, and the focus on practical aspects of retention management rather than scholarly retention theory, yet deliberately maintains distance between herself and her perceived “*others of opposition*” (Chang 2008, p. 26) with lexical choices. This strategy may be employed in order to preserve a sense of self and distinguish between “me” and “not me” (MacQuarrie 2010) or as a defence mechanism against institutional pressure to meet unattainable targets. It appears that all parties are “*maintaining social distance and making value judgments*” (Palfreyman 2005, p. 214) the author in the way she communicates, and her ‘others of opposition’ in judging her performance according to specific targets related to revenue rather than educational outcomes. The distinction between ‘being othered’ and ‘othering oneself’ is drawn during open coding (see p. 76 above).

There is a progression throughout the data from a personal sense of ‘otherness’ to a clear perception of belonging to a community within the campus. At the point of resignation, the researcher sees herself as part of a team and rather than speaking as an individual refers to “*my staff and I/me*” collectively on several occasions in her letter of resignation.



The staff who are initially her “*others of difference*” as they belong to an unfamiliar community (Chang 2008, p. 26) become her “*others of similarity*” (Chang 2008, p. 26) by virtue of working in the same environment and being subject to the same (institutional) pressures. Members of upper management remain her “*others of opposition*” (Chang 2008, p. 26) throughout and the lexical choices used for distancing herself from them continue to be made.

Autoethnographic accounts prompt educators to reflect on differences between themselves and students or colleagues (Laubscher and Powell 2003). The present researcher initially positioned herself as an outsider based on perceived cultural differences and lack of familiarity with the educational context. Instead of confirming the presence of ‘othering’, this stance provided the impetus for investigating the emergence of a core concept relating to the effects of institutional pressure in a for-profit environment.

The most significant way in which the autoethnographer is distinguishable from her co-workers is her clearly stated belief in education as a common good rather than a marketable commodity. However, she appears to suppress this belief for the ten-year duration of her career in for-profit education as she struggles with the challenging functions of her job. The faculty do not appear to share this philosophy and indicate that they are resigned to nature of the business (see Data Set 4) and while there is an undercurrent of philosophical ‘othering’ (and distaste for the profit motive in education on the part of the author) throughout the data, it does not appear to be the primary cause of her resignation. What prompts her to remove herself from the proprietary sector is a common shared concern regarding institutional pressure leading to questionable practices, and the attendant stresses of the work environment.

Whereas ‘othering’ is the least frequently occurring of the themes displayed in **Table 6** (p. 75 above) it was, nevertheless identified as a significant concept during the open coding stage of the research. Examples of ‘othering’, or of incidents originally perceived as ‘othering’ occur in early but not later data sets. Although the autoethnographer is distinguished from her ‘others of similarity’ by her rejection of education as a marketable commodity, she is united with them by both a common perception of institutional pressure, and concerns regarding questionable practices. Institutional pressure as a core concept will be discussed below (see Section 5.6).

### 5.3 Different Representations of Self that Emerge from the Data

The author initially perceives herself as ‘the other’ for a number of reasons later found to be related to (somewhat superficial) cultural differences or unfamiliarity with context. In addition she appears to ‘other’ herself by deliberate use of certain kinds of language. This behaviour could be attributable to the need to establish a coherent sense of self (MacQuarrie 2010). There are indeed different notions of self that emerge from the data. One of these is self as not peripheral to, but integrated into the campus community by virtue of shared functional goals and a rejection of practices that do not appear to be in the students’ best interests. The researcher is self-consciously British (see for example a reference to “*phlegmatic in the best British tradition*” in Data Set 1) and somewhat resentful of her immigrant status. Yet by Data Set 5, she writes as one of the team and refers to pressures experienced collectively together with the resultant effects of perceived lack of control, perceived unfairness and perceived questionable practices. She displays elements of code switching from one perception of self to another and has if not “*multiple subject positions*” (Laubscher and Powell 2003, p. 211) at least several positions depending on specific circumstances. For example, her Britishness makes her feel superior owing to positive reactions to her accent and assumptions about her level of education, while that very Britishness also places her in an inferior position as one subject to immigration restrictions and as one whose accent is perceived as a hindrance to her ability to communicate with students. She distances herself from superiors within the corporate structure by the use of British English and yet comes to see herself as a team member who is protective of those she supervises.

The reflective nature of autoethnography calls upon one to consider all aspects of self, including the less palatable features. Reference has been made to a conscious decision on the part of the autoethnographer to use particular language in order to distance herself from upper management. Her apology for sounding pompous in an email communication (Data Set 3) seems insincere. Though compassion is detectable in the researcher’s reaction to the students she meets on her first day, her stance is nevertheless that of a superior both in intellect (in Data Set 1 she claims certain students could “*barely write a coherent sentence*”) and social class (she describes students as “*grubby*”).

Despite her condescending attitude however, she expresses genuine concern for the students’ troubled circumstances and appears to construct her own somewhat self-

righteous identity in railing against the commodification of education, exploitation of low-income students and suspected questionable behaviours within the proprietary industry. Meanwhile she indulges in the hypocrisy of continuing to take a salary from the industry and struggling, often unsuccessfully, to meet the retention targets she denounces as unreasonable. Data not included in the sets selected for analysis but available in the appendices (see Appendix B, “On the List”) describe her short-lived glee at thinking she has won a corporate award for attaining the very goals she disapproves of so strongly. She also admits to having vaunted her experience in for-profit education in order to obtain a position at a for-profit university.

There is clear evidence in Data Set 3 of the autoethnographer’s willingness to express disapproval of certain practices to colleagues and managers via email, particularly with regard to retention targets and admissions procedures. Nevertheless, questions remain regarding why she composed yet failed to submit the resignation letter describing her concerns in detail. She speaks of reporting the alleged falsification of placement data to her superiors, which is commendable. However, why, instead of explaining her disquiet regarding a number of corporate decisions did she ultimately send a one-line missive confirming her last intended date of employment (see p. 97 above)? There are two possible explanations: one is a reluctance to incur the wrath of her employers, thus making it possible to work a conflict-free period of notice. The other is that she still felt the institutional pressure to which she had repeatedly succumbed sufficiently strongly to dissuade her from expressing her true opinion. This will be discussed further in Section 5.6 (below).

On p. 9 (above) the author suggests that she may have been scapegoated. There is evidence to suggest that scapegoating occurs institutionally and this will be discussed below in relation to the effects of institutional pressure (see Section 5.6). However, there is a possibility that she participates in splitting and projection of unbearable feelings by retransmitting corporate directives to those she supervises, while simultaneously communicating her dislike of those same directives to those who manage her. Powell (Laubscher and Powell 2003) claims that when people respond to us as ‘other’, our primary response is emotional. An emotional response to perceived ‘othering’, as for example in the case of accent, may have intensified a personal sense of victimization leading to an assumption of scapegoating.

As discussed on p. 48 above, the researcher emerges as one who has undergone the transformative effects of autoethnography by being “*forced to bend in a new way*” (Wall 2006, p. 4). In addition to increased awareness of her own role as a re-transmitter of unbearable feelings, changes within the self relate to embracing a new methodology, acknowledging the researcher’s right to express emotions and accepting the role of a “*highly visible social actor within the written text*” who is willing to reflect upon and critique her own actions (Anderson 2006, p. 383). The selection of analytical autoethnography sees the researcher writing in a more authoritative voice than an evocative autoethnographer, and seeking to extract theory from her data. In Data Sets 1 and 2, the autoethnographer focuses on self as a (legal alien) foreigner, employee and subordinate. By Data Sets 3 and 4 she has assumed multiple roles as interviewer, researcher, supervisor and a team member whose choice of questions is largely empathetic to the faculty members being interviewed. By Data Set 5 she is a fully integrated team member protesting on behalf of her staff and Data Set 6 – the journal from her new campus - sees her once again as an alienated outsider not destined to survive much longer in the for-profit environment (see Appendix A).

First and foremost, the autoethnographer is an educator. Initially she presents herself as a British Educator in the proprietary sector in the United States. Later her ethnicity becomes less significant and accounts for unfamiliarity with the system but not significant ‘othering’. The principal difference between the researcher and her ‘others of similarity’ is her inability as an educator to support the commodification of education. As an educator, she recognises her role on campus as a retention manager. This role conflicts with her view of education as a public good not to be sold for profit. This conflict will be discussed in the next section.

#### **5.4 Dissonance of Function, Belief and Ethic**

The researcher clearly states her position in the introduction:

*“Student retention is a yardstick by which competent teaching is measured. I find this and other practices within for-profit education difficult to reconcile to my personal views and practice as an educator.”* (p. 8 above)

Autoethnography has been described as “*people in the process of figuring out ... the meaning of their struggles*” (Ellis and Bochner 2006, p. 111). The present author’s struggles related to how to manage the conflict between her belief in education as a common good, the tasks she was expected to perform on behalf of a for-profit college, sometimes under perceived duress, and the perception of questionable practices occurring on campus. In her letter of resignation she describes a number of ways in which she believes corporate objectives take precedence over student needs. In the emails regarding retention she mentions enrolment practices that are clearly distasteful to her and claims that she is “*utterly dismayed*”. However, she makes repeated attempts to affect a reconciliation by striving to meet targets, transmitting corporate requirements to subordinates, monitoring retention percentages and executing the Regional Vice President’s plan to treat faculty like “*underperforming admissions reps*”. This includes use of the dreaded “*Instructor Attrition Board*”. As an educator, she recognises the value of Seidman’s (2005) retention formula, thus implying the possible reconciliation of student needs to profit motive. The autoethnographic data points to a potential acceptance of for-profit education as a viable alternative provided that all practices related to enrolment, retention and placement are seen to be ethical. This apparent willingness to adapt her working philosophy as an educator subsumes the autoethnographer into the larger group of co-administrators and faculty members. Within this group the majority believe that selling education for profit is a morally sound proposition, provided practices within the industry are ethical. The next section will focus on what the present study tells us about the morality of the proprietary sector and selling education for profit.

### **5.5 The Proprietary Sector and the Morality of Selling Education for Profit**

One of the stated purposes of this study was to gain insights into the proprietary industry in the United States. As the data show, the industry is peopled with employees whose reasons for working in education vary greatly. There is, for example, the campus dean in Data Set 1 who works patiently with every student on academic suspension to find a solution to his/her problems. Her motivation appears to be the satisfaction derived from helping individual students succeed against difficult odds. Then there are the faculty members for whom student success and subsequent employment is paramount. They share the dean’s desire to help students. Many corporate managers will claim that their motivation is similar and yet their behaviour suggests otherwise. Whereas the original proprietary schools of the colonial era served a public need, many members of today’s

private sector appear to cynically exploit students for access to government funding and profits. This behaviour has led to increased regulatory scrutiny, investigations and lawsuits. Some of the unacceptable practices highlighted in federal investigations - such as the Government Accountability Office findings described on p. 29 above - are similar in nature to incidents which occur in the data, for example alleged falsification of placement data and misleading information dispensed to prospective students by admissions departments. Neither the literature, nor the data present arguments for or against the morality of selling education for profit. (Is it a given in contemporary American society that selling education at a profit is acceptable provided no laws are broken and ethical practice is followed?) Some of the ethical dilemmas presented, however (for example exposing low-income students to hard-sell tactics in order to persuade them to enrol - see p. 32 above) impinge on the morality of the industry. Certainly for-profit institutions have important detractors, for example Arne Duncan, the U.S. Secretary of State who describes the worst offenders as “*predatory*” and some for-profit students as “*worse off*” than before they went to college (U.S. Department of Education 2014) owing to the large amount of debt they accrue.

On p. 32 (above) the researcher expresses concern regarding the potentially negative consequences of putting profit before people in an area such as education, generally regarded as necessary for the common good. However on p. 35 she comments that on the campuses where she worked “*the morality of selling education for profit was rarely discussed*” and that within the data sets, there is no mention of education as a service from which no profit should be made. It seems therefore, that this was a personal concern of the autoethnographer’s possibly derived from her cultural upbringing. Having been raised in a country (England) where no direct equivalent of the proprietary industry existed meant that for-profit education was an alien concept for her. There are therefore, no general conclusions to be drawn from the data regarding society’s view of education as a marketable product.

## **5.6 Formulating Theory - Institutional Pressure**

For the purposes of this research, ‘institutional pressure’ is pressure applied to college staff and faculty to act in a particular manner, execute certain practices or meet specific targets. This pressure is usually generated at the upper management or corporate level and

permeates through the organisation, thus it is institutional. Institutional pressure is almost always applied by superiors to subordinates, hence it is extremely difficult to resist.

All stages of data coding indicated that institutional pressure would be the emergent theme and the core concept around which eventual grounded theory would be formulated. During the open coding stage both *institutional pressure to meet corporate targets* and *perceived lack of control over events leading to student attrition* emerged as the most frequently recurring themes. The following cultural theme was the most frequently occurring by an overwhelming majority:

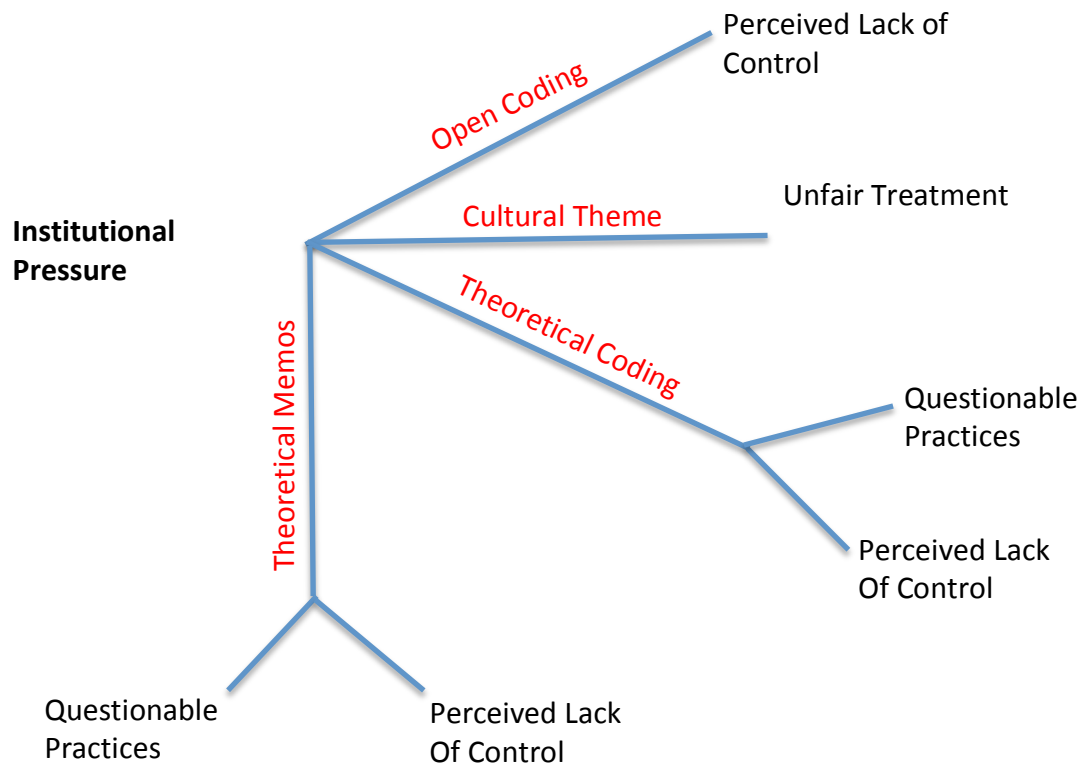
*4) It is unfair to hold faculty and staff accountable for things they cannot control (mentioned 43 times).*

Thus, during the early stages of coding, institutional pressure leading to a sense of unfairness over being held accountable for factors beyond the control of the individual employee emerged as the basis of a potential theory.

Theoretical coding reinforced this view by indicating that institutional pressure had the greatest causal influence over other concepts, for example questionable practices and perceived lack of control. Subsequent selective coding confirmed the prevalence of institutional pressure as the core explanatory concept to emerge from the data. Finally theoretical memoing showed not only that institutional pressure and questionable practices were the most frequently occurring concepts during the memoing stage but that the two concepts interacted with each other more than any other combination of concepts thus suggesting a strong connection between the two.

The above summary is depicted in **Diagram 1** (over):

**Diagram 1 – Connections Identified During Coding Stages**



**Diagram 1** shows the relationship between institutional pressure and other recurring themes and concepts at each stage of data coding.

But what of the actual theory generated by the various stages of coding and memoing? For this we turn once again to pertinent examples from both sources. By examining how memos have been sorted by relationship we can create theory around the presence of institutional pressure in proprietary education and the way in which it affects employee behaviour.

#### *5.6.1 Institutional Pressure in Relation to Other Significant Concepts*

The scrutiny of both coded data and theoretical memos indicates that the strongest inter-conceptual relationships exist between institutional pressure and questionable practices, and institutional pressure and a perceived lack of control over circumstances leading to failed performance. The data suggest that campus employees react to working under duress by either behaving in ways that may not be in students' best interests or by succumbing to a sense of hopelessness at a perceived inability to influence (for example)



factors contributing to student attrition. In memos 29 and 30 (please see Appendix E for all theoretical memos) the autoethnographer claims that her colleagues in the admissions department are responsible for enrolling unsuitable candidates in order to meet enrolment targets (see other examples of questionable admissions practices in Data Set 3). Also highlighted is the questionable practice of admitting students who are unlikely to benefit from an expensive education, and the perceived lack of control by academic staff unable to retain these students. There is therefore not only a link between institutional pressure and questionable practices but also a connection between said practices and the perception of powerlessness experienced by co-workers. The initial impetus for this chain of reactions is the pressure applied to admissions staff to “*make run rates*” (see p. 81 above) in much the same way as sales staff working for commercial enterprises selling purchasable goods (for example second-hand cars). Memo 47 describes another situation (also referenced in Data Set 5) whereby students are scheduled to take more classes than they can reasonably be expected to pass in order to generate revenue. The directive to register students in this way comes from the corporate office. Those in the academic department responsible for implementing this practice protest that it is a pedagogically unsound decision purportedly made for business reasons. However, they (including the researcher herself) are instructed to proceed and when students subsequently fail the courses (for which they have been charged) the staff perceive that they have been powerless to prevent this negative outcome. One might reasonably ask why staff members do not refuse to overschedule students in this way if they feel that it is wrong. An element of bullying that often accompanies pressure partly explains this behaviour. Threats such as “*Don’t you dare drop any more this month*” (see Data Set 5) and fear of losing one’s job might be enough to undermine any resistance. The researcher gives another example of bullying behavior used to reinforce institutional pressure in an autoethnographic piece entitled “The Beginning of the End” (see Appendix B) where she describes an attempt to resist making a significant reduction in a faculty member’s work hours and salary:

The Regional Vice President spoke, “*That’s the way it is. Take care of it.*”

I remained silent. Then the Human Resources Representative spoke, “*We all have decisions to make and yours is whether you choose to cooperate or not.*”

It was a warning.

She also describes how after nine years of either succumbing to the pressure to commit acts that while not illegal made her uncomfortable, or simply failing to meet corporate expectations (either because of reluctance to follow directives or an inability to meet extremely challenging targets) she finally summons up the courage to defy her employers:

*“Even though I expected my verbal resistance to have consequences, I felt no fear any more for my job. Right up until the year before, I would have worried that I might be fired and would have agonised over the danger of unemployment. Now, however, I felt defiant and indignant. “Let them fire me!” I said to my colleagues.”*

While memos 29 and 30 establish a link between institutional pressure and potentially questionable behaviour, other memos/data suggest that rather than behave in certain ways, some staff and faculty either try to resist pressure or simply fail to do what is asked of them and as a consequence do not meet expected performance standards. Typical responses include becoming exasperated or despondent. In Data Set 3 the researcher writes indignantly to her supervisor of “*seemingly unattainable targets*”. In memo 50 the autoethnographer ponders, “*If you feel you can’t control things – like attrition – do you opt out?*” The faculty members interviewed do not appear to participate in any questionable practices. They all, however, express frustration at not being able to influence circumstances for which they are held accountable, and complain that they are treated unfairly. As part of a previous Delphi study, the entire faculty was asked to complete an anonymous questionnaire related to retention. The following comments were taken from responses (see Appendix D):

*I can’t provide daycare or transportation for students.*

*I can’t give a student money.*

*I can’t drive them to school!*

*I can’t bring them to school every day or watch their kids.*

*I’m not a social worker.*

*I’m not going to go to their house and pick them up!*

*This is a school before a business!*

*I am here to teach – not babysit or be a psychiatrist.*

All of the above comments suggest that instructors felt powerless to prevent the student attrition for which they were held accountable.

Thus far we have established a link between institutional pressure prompting employees on the one hand to engage in arguably questionable practices and on the other hand to defy orders or simply fail to meet corporate expectations. The trigger for these behaviours appears to be the same (institutional pressure) but what of the consequences? In both the introduction and the literature review (above) increased government scrutiny of the proprietary industry is mentioned. In most instances, where state or federal regulations have been broken, campuses will excuse the behaviour by attributing the wrongdoing to individual rogue employees who, it seems, used poor judgement and acted alone. For example the Campus Director in Data Set 6 who is dismissed for alleged regulatory non-compliance. However, in other cases, it is probable that the employee acted under corporate direction. The researcher herself, along with others, reported a colleague for alleged inconsistencies in the reporting of placement data and the person concerned was dismissed following an investigation. Two years later, it emerged in the press that the entire organisation was under investigation for similar inconsistencies. Though this does not excuse the dismissed employee's transgressions, it implies that she did not act in isolation, and that the impetus to behave in this way came from elsewhere. Could this employee have felt compelled by institutional pressure to perform questionable acts? Was she afraid of losing her job if she did not meet placement targets? Those teachers who perceived they had no control over the life circumstances of students they were expected to retain did not appear to resort to arguably questionable behaviours but they also had concerns that every student departure was a strike against their record. Instructors with poor retention percentages were not re-hired, just as admissions representatives who failed to enrol sufficient new students did not remain employed for long. There were also those who, unable to withstand the pressure – the present author included – chose to leave. These employees all had a common burden, that of institutional pressure. They responded in different ways. However, the outcome was similar in most cases. Unable to transform “*unbearable feelings*” into “*benign and acceptable forms*” (Dunning et al. 2005, p. 244) they left the campus. Is scapegoating therefore the final piece of our theory?

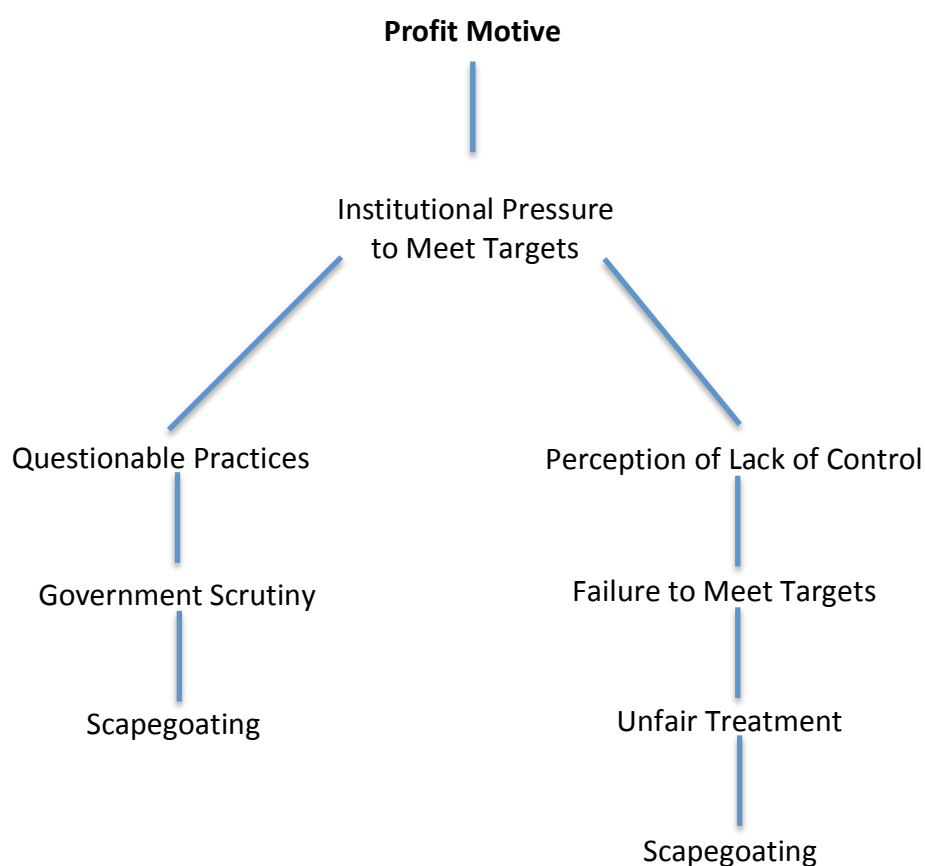
The autoethnographer perceived initially that she was unable to process negativity and admits to having retransmitted negativity regarding campus practices to subordinates.

Prior to completing her research, she speculates that, like ‘John’ in Dunning et al. (2005) she was scapegoated. However, the data suggests that, far from being ‘othered’ in this respect, she was one of many who suffered a similar fate. It appears that many staff and faculty on the proprietary campus were subject to institutional pressure. In conjunction with the tension created by pitting one department against another (for example faculty members who complain of “*taking the hit*” for admissions’ unsuitable enrolments) this pressure generated continual splitting, projection and apportioning of blame. As we have discussed, some staff were allegedly dismissed for non-compliance with regulations. Others lost their jobs for failing to meet corporate targets, and others, unable to reconcile themselves to the for-profit culture, left of their own accord. Regardless of each employee’s reason for leaving, it would be reasonable to assume that he/she introjected negative feelings about his/her working environment and became a repository of collective discomfort (Obholzer and Roberts, 1994). Those who ‘took the hit’ for the corporation were scapegoated in the traditional sense, but those, like the autoethnographer, who felt compelled by circumstances to depart were also scapegoats in as far as when they left taking their negativity with them. Their departure was probably greeted with relief by the very institution that had applied pressure to them in the first place.

#### 5.6.2 *The Theory*

Proprietary schools are in business to make a profit. This distinguishes them from non-profit and public post-secondary colleges. We can therefore assume that the impetus behind a proprietary campus is the profit motive. We have established that the core concept to emerge from the present research data is that of *institutional pressure*. We have also described the connection between *institutional pressure* and both *arguably questionable practices* and a *perceived lack of control* over outcomes for which staff are held accountable. There is a tendency for recipients of institutional pressure to either indulge in questionable practices in order to meet performance goals or perceive themselves as powerless to influence those goals. In either case the result is failure. We know that rule breakers are susceptible to dismissal, particularly in the wake of government scrutiny, as are employees who do not meet expected targets. Those unable to meet targets who feel powerless yet refuse to behave in ways that they feel may be detrimental to students are likely to feel unfairly treated when dismissed. The outcome for both groups is departure accompanied by possible scapegoating. This succession of events can be depicted thus:

**Diagram 2 – Theory Related to Institutional Pressure**



**Diagram 2** shows the profit motive in proprietary education as an impetus for institutional pressure applied to staff to meet targets – resulting in two possible outcomes, both of which culminate in scapegoating.

If we return to Chang’s definition of autoethnographic theory as “*a conjecture or postulate that explains a social phenomenon*” (2008, p. 137) we can describe our emergent theory in the following way:

The autoethnographic data presented in the current research suggests that institutional pressure, driven by the profit motive in proprietary post-secondary education can produce two outcomes:

1) Staff members feel compelled by institutional pressure to behave in ways that may render the campus vulnerable to increased government scrutiny, which in turn leads to dismissal and scapegoating of perpetrators.

2) Staff members feel unable to control the factors which determine the outcomes for which they are held accountable and their subsequent failure to meet performance goals leads to scapegoating and departure (either by voluntary separation or dismissal).

An example of outcome 1) would be the alleged inconsistencies in the reporting of placement data described in Data Set 5. The individual responsible lost her job. In Data Set 2, I describe how I expect this person to be “*subjected to a grilling*” for not attaining placement targets. There is an assumption that pressure will be applied in order to encourage more effective outcomes. While there is no actual proof that she reported inaccurate data in order to avoid dismissal, it is a plausible theory, particularly when a Government Accountability Office investigation discovered inconsistencies in the reporting of placement data on a number of campuses. The corporation dismissed the employee, quite possibly in order to disassociate itself from alleged non-compliant behaviour.

Outcome 2) is exemplified by both faculty and admissions representatives. Of the six faculty members interviewed, all six expressed frustration at being held accountable for circumstances leading to student departure over which they had no perceived influence. To my knowledge, at least five of the six have now left the campus, though none was actually dismissed. Therefore, it is reasonable to conjecture that pressure to meet student retention targets led to a feeling of lack of control which, coupled with a refusal to behave in questionable ways simply resulted in failure. The corporation’s adverse reaction to this failure created a sense of unfairness that may have caused these faculty members to leave, scapegoated. Perceived high turnover in the Admissions Department suggests that the corporation simply dismissed underperforming employees. Again, they left, possibly scapegoated and probably feeling unfairly treated for taking the blame for not meeting unreasonable enrolment targets.

The following chapter will evaluate the research’s effectiveness as an analytical autoethnography and the potential value of the emergent theory.

## CHAPTER 6

### EVALUATION

#### 6.1 Richardson's Evaluation Criteria

As is suggested on p. 70 (above) autoethnography does not lend itself to traditional evaluation criteria of validity, reliability and generalizability. Lather (1986, p. 67) claims that the existence of “*catalytic validity*” can be determined by “*the degree to which the research process energises participants and alters their consciousness*”. Garratt and Hodgkinson (1998, p. 523) ask “*Does this account work for us? Do we find it to be believable and evocative on the basis of our own experience?*” The latter question was asked of two third party respondents (both educators, one British and one American) who read the autoethnographic data (including additional data sets included in the appendices) and commented. ‘Mia’ who teaches in a community college in the United States, wrote:

*"I found this account to be believable, honest, and thoughtful. I learned something from this account, and I think of it from time to time since I work in the field of education and ponder the positive and negative changes that have occurred over the years in this field."*

However, for an evaluation of the research itself we turn to Richardson's (2000a) evaluation criteria and consider each in turn:

#### **1) Substantive contribution** – *does this piece contribute to our understanding of social life?*

Readers who are not familiar with proprietary education in the United States will gain an awareness of the industry from the research. For example ‘Mia’ wrote:

*"I have been aware of proprietary schools in the U.S. since reaching adulthood, but was unaware of the exact nature of their services and policies until Helen began working for one. After reading and hearing about Helen's experiences and thoughts about this type of education in the U.S., I have learned a great deal more about these for-profit institutions."*

More specifically the findings will raise awareness of the effects of institutional pressure on staff and faculty. Those who see education as a service rather than a marketable commodity will identify with the autoethnographer's predicament while those who accept the principle of for-profit education will find the potential for questionable behaviours within the industry concerning:

*"I had to pay for my education at each school and am still paying for my loans for graduate school, so the idea that some people choose and pay for an education at at a community college or university, didn't seem that strange or different to me. However, after learning about the mainly at-risk student population, the emphasis on enrolment numbers, student retention, business over education, and the high cost of the programs, I am very shocked and have conflicted feelings about this model of education."* (Mia)

**2) Aesthetic Merit** – *does this piece succeed aesthetically?*

Aesthetic merit is arguably less critical in analytical than in evocative ethnography. The researcher is not relying on the narrative to *"resonate with the reader, rather than offer an analysis of the occurrence"* (Struthers 2012, p. 11). However, respondents Jan and Mia's use of words such as *"sad"* *"disgusted"* *"shocked"* suggest that the narrative data in particular provoked an emotional response in readers. The work, therefore, while not necessarily as aesthetically pleasing as an evocative work, is effective.

**3) Reflexivity** – *does this piece address ethical issues, self-awareness and self-exposure?*

The autoethnography addresses the morality of selling education for profit and examines a number of typical behaviours within the industry that are questionable in ethical terms. The research culminates in the creation of a theory in regard to the institutional pressure which the author contends, is endemic on proprietary college campuses. The autoethnographer reveals information about herself, her philosophy of education, and her personal response to an apparent dissonance of function and belief that causes her to act in ways that are unacceptable (for example the splitting and projection of unbearable feelings). In moving from an initial assumption of being 'othered' towards an acceptance of shared responsibility as a group member with 'others of similarity', she demonstrates a heightened awareness of herself and her role as participant and author.



**4) Impact** – *does it affect me? Emotionally? Intellectually?*

By using words such as “*shocked*” “*disgusted*” and “*disappointed*” third party respondents confirm that they were affected emotionally. Mia responds intellectually when she questions the morality of putting business needs before those of the students. Jan’s response is highly emotional:

*“The most overwhelming feeling I have is sadness:*

- 1. Sadness for those involved as instructors, administrators and students;*
- 2. Sadness that ‘bums on seats’ pervades the business;*
- 3. Sadness that there are signs in the UK of a similar approach;*
- 4. Sadness regarding the toll it took on you.”*

**5) Expresses a reality** – *does it seem “true”, a credible account of a cultural, social, individual, or communal sense of the “real”?*

The account is based upon personal ‘facticities’. Nevertheless ‘Jan’ found it thought-provoking and relevant to her work as an educator in Britain. She saw both positive and negative aspects of for-profit education expressed in the data and was able to draw parallels with the United Kingdom thus reinforcing the point that the autoethnography could “*fuse the personal and the societal*” (Sparkes 1996, p. 463):

*“‘Bums on seats’ sadly is increasing in the UK. I see it all the time, especially concerning overseas students. These are rich pickings and students are enrolled who are not linguistically up to following degree or masters’ programmes. Your reference to accountability on the part of academics is something we need more of in our higher education institutions ‘Money for old rope’ is also reflected in the wealth of seemingly dumbed down university courses to encourage students to enrol regardless of job prospects. Apprenticeships and practical courses have always been underrated and undervalued in the UK, much to my disgust. It will be interesting to see if the huge increase in student fees will have an impact on teaching standards in higher education. Based on your experience, it would appear not – students will live with life time loans as they are increasingly doing now.”*

## 6.2 Anderson's Key Features of Analytical Autoethnography

It would also be appropriate to assess the extent to which the research exemplifies the key features of analytical autoethnography as suggested by Anderson (2006, p. 378):

- (1) Complete member researcher status (CMR)
- (2) Analytic reflexivity
- (3) Narrative visibility of the researcher's self
- (4) Dialogue with informants beyond the self
- (5) Commitment to theoretical analysis

Not only do I demonstrate that I have opportunistic CMR status by integrating into the campus team but also as a CMR I am “*approximating the emotional stance of the people [I] study*” (Anderson 2006, p.379). This is illustrated by my progression as an autoethnographer away from a personal sense of ‘otherness’ and towards a shared perception of institutional pressure, lack of control over circumstances governing student retention/attrition and common challenges regarding questionable practices. My earlier concerns about the chronology of data collection do not appear to have hindered the ultimate formulation of theory, indeed Anderson's view that “*being a CMR facilitates the availability of data*” (2006, p. 389) is evident, as the data I present could, for the most part, only have been gathered by someone with unrestricted access to the community under examination. I had hoped to become “*the ultimate participant in a dual participant-observer role*” (Merton 1998, p. 18) and believe I have achieved this by demonstrating the progression from a role of outsider with a sense of ‘otherness’ to insider with a feeling of belonging to a team with shared burdens.

My initial sense of being ‘the other’ may have facilitated analytic reflexivity and an ability to view situations initially from without and later from within (Schwalbe 1996). Just as I reflect upon different representations of self that emerge from the analysis of data, I also reflect on the role self plays within the college community and the way in which the process permits access to the environment under examination. This focus on the self gives the autoethnographer the visibility (both in the data and the interpretation of data) required. At no time as researcher, autoethnographer, participant, educator or team member do I choose to be “*anthropologically strange*” (Hammersley and Atkinson 2005, p. 9) invisible

or omniscient. As an analytical autoethnographer I am a “*highly visible social actor within the written text*” (Anderson 2006, p. 383) albeit one who speaks with a more authoritative voice than an evocative autoethnographer. The inclusion of dialogue with informants beyond the self in the form of faculty interviews prevents self-absorption (Rosaldo 1993). It also permits me as researcher to identify points of commonality with those ‘others of similarity’ who at one time were ‘others of difference’.

Finally the deliberate decision to formulate theory from emergent themes (by means of grounded theory) as opposed to simply “*capturing what is going on*” (Anderson 2006, p. 387) with a view to evoking a response, has facilitated a strong commitment to the theoretical analysis required. A summary of that process and theory follows in the concluding chapter below.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

#### 7.1 Research Outcomes

By means of analytical autoethnography, I have identified a connection between the application of institutional pressure and the recurring themes of perceived lack of control, unfair treatment and questionable practices in the proprietary industry in the United States. Using grounded theory as a method, I have created a theory to explain the social phenomenon of scapegoating in for-profit education. The theory postulates that institutional pressure applied to staff and faculty to reach performance targets may result in either questionable behaviours, or the perception of lack of control over (external) performance-related factors. In both cases, the probable outcome is failure to meet goals, whether they be in enrolment numbers, student retention or student placement. Failure to meet corporate expectations in these areas may lead to dismissal or resignation. In either case, there is a possibility that the employee will be scapegoated.

#### 7.2 The Research question

The original research question asked the following:

*What can my experiences as a British Educator in the United States reveal about for-profit post-secondary education and the extent to which phenomena such as ‘othering’ and scapegoating occur?*

Answers to the both components of the above question were sought by using grounded theory in conjunction with the epistemological assumptions of symbolic interactionism whereby “*researchers... view the social world as constructed interactionally, via language, communication, interrelationships, and social groups ...*” (Allen Collinson and Hockey 2005, p. 189).

The core concept to emerge from interpretation of the data was that of institutional pressure which was seen to operate in conjunction with other concepts such as a perception of lack of control over the ability to meet revenue-linked corporate targets. Institutional pressure also operated in conjunction with the questionable practices that

some staff members appeared willing to execute in order to meet those targets. The consequence of both perceived lack of control and questionable practice was the possibility that failing employees would be scapegoated.

In terms of the phenomena investigated, the autoethnographer discovered that her sense of ‘otherness’ was both exaggerated and less significant than originally thought. Though initially being an outsider (with an alternative perspective owing to nationality) gave her a different perspective, ‘othering’ does not appear to be the cause of her subsequent departure from the proprietary industry. There is evidence to suggest that she was scapegoated, but not as an individual victim ‘othered’ by accent, belief in education as a common good or other characteristics. Instead it was as a staff member sharing a fate common with co-workers and those she supervised, many of whom held similar views regarding practices which they felt were not in the best interests of students. While for the researcher there was a dissonance of function, belief and ethic, her eventual departure did not result from being ‘othered’, or from an inability to support the principle of selling education for profit. It came, instead, from a failure to perform expected functions in terms of retention management, and a rejection of certain practices mandated by corporate directives. Concurrent with and contributing to this failure was the inability to complete the “*key educational task*” (Dunning et al. 2005, p. 244) of receiving and transforming unbearable feelings into benign forms. As a manager, the researcher was complicit in the culture of blame present on the campus as she split, projected and retransmitted negativity both to her subordinates and back to the superiors from whence the original feelings had come. Though the autoethnographer held distinctly different views from her colleagues regarding the morality of selling education for profit, repeated attempts by her to reconcile student and corporate needs suggest a willingness to participate in efforts to meet business objectives. In other words, distaste for the profit motive did not prevent her from striving to meet her employers’ expectations, though she and co-workers (for example the faculty members interviewed) declined to indulge in practices they considered questionable. This desire to perform successfully in spite of moral objections to for-profit education may have come from a personal need for validation or may possibly have resulted from a fear of being bullied.

During the process of the research, different representations of self emerged (for example from British and ‘othered’, to educator, autoethnographer, researcher, participant and

integrated member of a staff team) which indicated not only the progression from perceived ‘other’ to perceived community member, but also represented a transformation from one who reflects on individual experience to one who ponders the wider, societal significance of that experience.

### **7.3 Societal Implications of Research**

While the autoethnographer experienced a dissonance of function and belief, her colleagues also experienced a misalignment of required duties and ethical belief. Based on examples of questionable practices in the data, students are possibly manipulated into purchasing education and enrolled under conditions of “*severe inequality*” (Sandel 2000, p. 94). However, the research does not make significant revelations with regard to the morality of selling education for profit. It suggests instead that business objectives are served better than students needs and demonstrates how the profit motive and institutional pressure appear to be connected. The researcher and her colleagues appear to be subjected to similar pressures, related for example to managing student retention. Their reactions are also similar in that they feel a sense of hopelessness. Perceived unfair treatment, resulting from failure to meet targets, is also common to both the autoethnographer and her colleagues. This treatment includes punitive, shaming language and perceived bullying by corporate managers. This collective experience of institutional pressure and unfair treatment expands the scope of the study from analysis of the autoethnographer’s personal circumstances to campus-wide phenomena. Examples cited in the literature review suggest that similar phenomena are experienced throughout the proprietary industry.

### **7.4 Implications for Education and Future Research**

The current work addresses deficiencies in the literature by addressing how staff and faculty are affected by such phenomena as institutional pressure. The research findings provide an antidote to certain media sensationalism by offering evidence of how the profit motive in education might result in questionable practices currently causing concern to state and federal regulating agencies. The study addresses the nature of the industry rather than reinforcing existing literature, which appears to laud its profitability. It describes how the profit motive in proprietary education can result in institutional pressure, thereby creating tension between co-workers and college departments. This tension can, in turn, lead to questionable practices and/or a collective sense of hopelessness.

In educational terms the autoethnography is used successfully to access the proprietary industry. It shows that where the profit motive exists, there are concerns regarding the reconciliation of business and educational objectives. One can but conjecture that were the element of profit to be removed, the perceived need to apply pressure to subordinates would be reduced and the impetus for questionable practices in relation to meeting performance goals would be significantly diminished.

Various possible foci for future research arise from the current study. The importance of positive student retention and completion outcomes is rarely disputed. Therefore, there is much to be gleaned from an examination of instructor attitudes towards retention and accountability. If variables related to external circumstances beyond the control of individual teachers are factored into the calculation of attrition statistics, how might this improve instructor morale, reduce institutional pressure and facilitate the creation of effective faculty-driven retention strategies? In addition, although the present autoethnography was subject to the emergence of themes, and therefore unable to fully address issues relating to the commodification of education, there is surely more to be learned in this respect. The fact that concepts regarding belief and philosophy in education as a common good (as opposed to a marketable commodity) did not emerge from the data, does not diminish the importance or potential of this topic for future research. Finally, this study produced a theory linking the profit motive, institutional pressure and scapegoating. There is certainly potential for further exploration and investigation of this theory by other qualitative means.

## **7.5 Summary of Conclusion**

This research enquiry began by describing the intense scrutiny under which proprietary education in the United States currently finds itself. As the industry serves 13 percent of all American postsecondary students and appears to receive a disproportionate amount of federal funding, this level of scrutiny is right and proper. Particular concerns regard the failure to prepare graduates for gainful employment and the management of student debt. This research expanded the debate by relating both to the general public and a more specific audience of educators, insights into the circumstances of those who work in for-profit education. It used examples of the researcher's personal experience and the experiences, thoughts and comments of her co-workers to illustrate those circumstances.

A theory regarding the existence and causes of the social phenomenon of scapegoating was postulated. The researcher, who initially believed she was ‘othered’, recognized a common bond with her co-workers in terms of the perceived effects of institutional pressure and the negative outcomes of scapegoating. The autoethnographic data, which began with accounts of unfamiliarity and ‘othering’ gradually turned into tales of commonality and shared experience as she reacted to decisions which impacted both students and colleagues. We can but hope that her endeavours to “*fuse the personal and the societal*” (Sparkes 1996, p. 463) within the proprietary industry will prompt further discussion and debate about the nature, and future of for-profit education in the United States.



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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Final Data Selection

#### Data Set 1 - My First Day as Associate Dean

**Written March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2012, recounting the events of January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2002**

*I was working as a sales associate in a kitchen supply store and a part-time ESL instructor in a community college and needed a full-time job. Although my two jobs were relatively stress free and enjoyable, I wasn't making enough to pay the bills and had no health insurance (a major concern in the United States). My only option was to find a position with 'benefits'. When I saw an advertisement in the paper for an Associate Dean at a local college, I thought I had found the ideal opportunity. I was under the misapprehension that this college taught ESL – an environment I was well qualified to work in. It was only after I had persuaded the Dean to meet with me for an informational interview that I realized I was wrong. I did not admit my error, of course. Instead, I attempted to say all the right things to the (extremely nice) woman who had agreed to meet with me and made sure I picked up a college catalog on my way out so I could actually study the programs they offered in the hope that I would be invited back for a formal interview.*

*Three weeks later I received a call asking me to meet with the College President. This time, I made sure I knew about the programs. The college offered Associate Degrees (two-year degrees) in subjects such as accounting and medical assisting. It seemed similar to the technical college in Britain where I had taken my A-levels. This kind of college was very different from where I had been working but I felt as if I knew enough about education, adult learners and managing faculty to be able to do the job. It seems I made a good account of myself with the College President because I was invited back a few days later for a telephone interview with the Regional Retention Manager. I wasn't entirely sure what 'retention' meant but assumed it had something to do with not losing students so I showed up armed with strategies for monitoring the quality of classroom instruction and obviously hit some of the right notes.*

*The next day I received a job offer and after some negotiation of salary and schedule - they initially wanted me to work every day from 12:00 (noon) till 9:00 pm and I managed to get them to agree to two late nights only per week – I accepted.*

*Nothing could have prepared me for my first day at work. I was invited to sit in the Dean's office (my new boss) and observe as she met with students who were beginning the quarter on academic suspension. I encountered a student body that was unlike any I had previously worked with. No doubt there were many among the 700 or so population who were doing fine, both economically and academically; those would be the ones I never saw. However, those who came up to the 5<sup>th</sup> floor to "see the Deans" were struggling, not only in their classes but also invariably in their lives. When they came to fill out their academic appeals, many of them could barely write a coherent sentence. They dressed, not in the casual style of students, but in the worn, grubby attire of those who had no other clothes to wear and certainly no access to a washing machine. When it came to explaining why they had failed so many courses, the reasons were varied but related to challenges I had never had to face in my life: incarceration, serious illness with no access to medical care, homelessness ("I'm living in my car" was a common remark), drug abuse and spousal abuse. When it came to leave, they often asked for bus fare because they had no way of getting home.*

*As I sat in my supervisor's office watching and listening to a succession of students, each one with an equally troubling account of how he/she was suffering extreme hardship, I worked hard to conceal my surprise. The Dean was patient with all the students, appeared totally unsurprised by any of the catastrophes they related to her and focused on what she could actually do – within the college's regulations – to help them get back on track with their studies. At the end of the day she joked with me about whether I would be coming back the next day after what I had witnessed. I tried to remain phlegmatic (in the best 'British' tradition) but she knew I was a little shocked.*

*That day, I had arrived thinking that for the first time after so many years of EFL teaching and training; I was finally getting to work in a 'real college'. I left feeling as though for the first time in my life, after so many years of working with the relatively privileged, I finally knew what poverty looked like.*



## **Data Set 2 – ‘Othered!’**

**Written May 2011, one month after I had left the College, recounting events from two years before**

*“Did he mention anything?” I was curious as to what our Divisional President (the manager in overall charge of more than 30 colleges) had said to my supervisor (the Acting College President – in temporarily to replace our retired president while a permanent replacement was sought). To be honest, I was taken aback that he had wanted to meet with me at all. In a results-driven business, the ‘Big Cheese’ only tended to interview campus directors who were not meeting their targets. I was doing well, making budget and achieving improved results year-on-year. I had expected our VIP visitor to subject our struggling Director of Career Services to a grilling and was surprised, though not worried when I was summoned to the President’s office for what turned into a 45 minute discussion on retention and ‘effective teaching’. I felt comfortable about my answers and referred at least twice to my doctoral research to back up points about the importance of building a sense of community for the students. My interlocutor seemed more interested in nominating individual instructors and asking me how ‘good’ they were. He wanted examples of how well they knew their students (“Does he know what they had for breakfast? Does he know why they look tired?”). I thought the questions were legitimate though he barely gave me time to answer. I agreed that ‘knowing’ students can be a critical factor in addressing their needs. I actually quite enjoyed the encounter, was intellectually stimulated by it and returned to my office feeling quite happy.*

*Thus, my supervisor’s response to my question came as a shock: “He said he thinks you may be too academic for the position. But then he said it might be your accent”. “That’s racist!”, I blurted. In my 15 years as a speaker of British English living in the United States, I have only ever received a positive response to my accent. I speak Southern British English - a version relatively close to Received Pronunciation. My experience is that Americans tend to make assumptions about my being well educated based on the way I speak. This is generally a positive thing. Here, the suggestion appeared to be that my educated sounding British accent prevented me from communicating effectively with my student population. “I told him you had no problems at all relating to the students”, my supervisor said. “I shouldn’t worry about it.” I wondered if she was regretting actually repeating his comments to me. “Heaven forbid I should be academic, I’m only the Academic Dean!”*

### **Data Set 3 – Student Retention Emails**

#### **Written June 2011, while unemployed**

About six months ago, after nearly nine years as Academic Dean of a Career College in the United States, I decided to resign. I sat in my living room one Saturday morning and said to my partner *“I feel as though I’m going to have a stroke or a nervous breakdown – or both – if I don’t get out of that place”*. Three months later, I gave one month’s notice (longer than the usual two weeks considered appropriate in an ‘at-will’ state) and as of April 2011, I was unemployed. My resignation was the result of a combination of circumstances which created major stresses for me in the workplace. The most frequent source of stress was the disproportionate amount of time I had to devote to scrutinizing student retention/attrition numbers and reporting to my supervisor and others in management positions throughout the company on a daily basis. A large number of our ‘drops’ were students I felt we had no hope of saving. I refer to examples of these below. ‘Repeat offenders’ were students who started to miss class but were tracked down – often by their instructors – and persuaded to return, only to go missing again. If any student missed two weeks of school and did not appear in class the very next session, he/she would have to be withdrawn administratively per an attendance policy put in place to appease the state who worried that we might be charging ‘unearned’ tuition. What frequently happened was that after numerous phone calls, emails and letters, these students would return just in time to avoid being dropped and then go missing again. The email exchanges below between various colleagues and myself address the tensions that existed between departments and with regard to corporate policies. Where there are large amounts of corporate jargon, I have included a translation of the text into Standard English in italics.

#### **Email 1**

##### **Email**

**From:** Dunford, Helen  
**Sent:** Wednesday, December 08, 2010 11:42 AM  
**To:** (College President)  
**Subject:** Attrition Update

We had no option but to drop 7 students today for attendance violation. One suffered a bereavement and another stated to his department chair that he would not return owing to the new student dress code. The other 5, several of whom are repeat offenders, have

disappeared on us. I will get an end-of-the-month projection to you by Friday but as I said yesterday, we are unlikely to make our budget of 28. (*The maximum number of students we can afford to lose during the month without exceeding the permitted attrition percentage.*)

Just to get some perspective on this, last year we finished December at net 49 on a population of 732 (6.9%). The same percentage of our current population would be net 46. We will better this. I understand that the corporation chooses to ignore historical and/or local variables in setting its targets but as long as they continue to publish an SPR with year-on-year comparisons, I will consider it relevant. (*Translation: the corporation has set us such an impossible retention target this December that even though we are likely to retain a higher percentage of students than in the same month last year, we will miss the goal by a long way. Instead of taking the specific circumstances of each campus into account – for example the catchment area and demographic details – every school owned by the corporation has been told to meet the same retention standards and failure to do so will have repercussions. ‘SPR’ means ‘Student Performance Report’. It shows month-by-month retention numbers for successive years and thus provides a point of comparison.*) I apologize if I sound a little pompous but this is putting my staff and me under duress. While it is more than reasonable to demand discernible improvement, it is neither reasonable, nor motivating to set seemingly unattainable targets.

Helen Dunford  
Academic Dean

## **Email 2**

A frequent concern for me was the way in which the individual targets set for different departments on the campus put employees at odds with each other. The Admissions Department appeared to be under enormous pressure to meet enrollment targets, which, in the opinion of the Academic Department, tempted them to enroll unsuitable candidates. The email below is an example of one of these situations. There were many. I generally felt that the admissions representatives were good people trying to do a good job but in the same way that we in the Academic Department would pull at-risk students back from the brink and persuade them not to leave the college, it seemed they sometimes encouraged prospective students to make poor decisions and start college when they were not ready.

The turn over in the Admissions Department was very high. We commented to each other that at least one staff member would disappear every month. Even though state laws prohibited admissions representatives from receiving commission, they still needed to ‘make their numbers’ by enrolling a certain number of students per month in order to keep their jobs.

#### **Email**

**From:** Dunford, Helen  
**Sent:** Wednesday, March 09, 2011 11:09 AM  
**To:** (Director of Admissions)  
**CC:** (Associate Academic Dean)  
**Subject:** (Maria XXXXX)

I’m perplexed by Maria’s situation. In her file, which we have just received, under ‘Transportation Plan’, there is a blank space and under ‘Back-up Plan’ she wrote, “*I have a car but no job to pay gas*”. It seems she had neither a plan (*for getting to class*), nor a viable back up and now she is a drop. She mentions only her boyfriend under the question regarding investment in education where she intimates that he will help her make payments. As we know, he is not in a position to do so.\* I personally would have considered this to be a ‘drop waiting to happen’ and would have asked her to return when she actually had transportation. Perhaps you could discuss this with the rep who enrolled her?

Helen Dunford  
Academic Dean

*\* We had subsequently learned that the boyfriend this student claimed would help her financially was incarcerated.*

#### **Email 3**

My supervisor had told me to “*stop getting frustrated at the wrong things*”. I understood her point. She felt that worrying about what I could not change was a waste of time. One thing I could not change was a corporate decision to bring forward the deadline for

‘reversals’. A reversal meant that if the Admissions Department enrolled a student who subsequently had to be withdrawn because we discovered he/she did not really graduate from high school, was not eligible for Financial Aid, had given us false information, or had a criminal background that would prevent him/her from being employed, the ‘drop’ would not count against the Academic Department. Originally we had two weeks to verify student information during which time that student was permitted to begin classes. If during those two weeks we found that the student was ineligible, he/she would be withdrawn, would not owe the college anything and the Admissions Department would ‘lose a start’. The change in policy brought the deadline forward by one week meaning we had a near impossible task. (It usually takes several weeks to get proof of graduation from a high school, and often takes a week to run a criminal background check.) We found ourselves ‘taking the hit’ for ineligible students, simply because the corporation did not want to risk losing the enrollment by making the student wait to begin classes and because they determined that one week was sufficient to gather all the necessary background information. This was one of the hardest drops for a faculty member to accept. It counted against my department and the individual teacher’s retention numbers, yet it was impossible to prevent. In some cases the student had simply lied to us. In other cases, he/she genuinely thought he/she had finished high school but fell a couple of credits short of graduating or had a ‘modified diploma’ of the type awarded to students with special educational needs and not acceptable to the state for college admission. In the case of criminal background checks, the candidate was often aware of a felony on his/her record but simply hoped that somehow it would not show up during the routine background checks we had to run for students hoping to work in certain professions. On a number of occasions, students told me after the event that they had admitted to a criminal background during the admissions process but had been told by admissions staff not to worry about it.

#### **Email**

**From:** Dunford, Helen  
**Sent:** Thursday February 17, 2011, 11:03 AM  
**To:** (College President)  
**Subject:** Two unanticipated drops.

Unfortunately we are dropping both Sara Smith because she cannot get funding and Jessica Rivera - who was a new start in January – because she wants a “*shorter, cheaper*

*program” nearer to where she lives. She lives in Old Ville, which is already some distance to commute into Newtown and is now going to the Middleton campus which is 7 miles closer. I am disappointed that these critical factors (program length, cost and commuting distance) did not come up during the admissions process. But perhaps I am, once again, “frustrated at the wrong things”? Obviously the potential 40 drops we will suffer on an annual basis as a result of changes to the time limit for reversals is insignificant. (I am not being facetious. I am utterly dismayed.)*

*Owing to these additional drops, we should call 40 for February. (Translation: every week I had to project exactly how many students we would lose from our total population by the end of each month. This number was then passed up the management line to divisional headquarters. The expectation was that I would be well-informed enough about at-risk students to be able to predict with accuracy. This particular month I had ‘called’ a total of 38 drops and therefore failed to demonstrate that I was sufficiently ‘on top of the numbers’. This number of drops reflected poorly on me and my entire department. The two students mentioned above would have been ‘reversals’ under the previous rule but since the deadline had been brought forward, they counted as drops.)*

Helen Dunford  
Academic Dean

#### **Email 4**

Every ‘region’ in the United States and Canada had a regional vice president. His/her job was to make sure that all colleges under his/her jurisdiction met all revenue targets. I, together with a number of fellow deans on other campuses, received the following email after I failed to meet my monthly retention target. I have left the punctuation and spelling as it was in the original.

#### **Email**

**From:** (Regional Vice President)  
**Sent:** Monday, August 23, 10:58 AM  
**To:** (Presidents/Academic Deans of three regional campuses including mine)  
**Subject:** Attrition Tracking Template.

Your attrition for the month is over the budgeted percentage, given this overage we need to approach this like we would an underperforming admissions rep. Next Monday on my 9:00 am call I will have to give a report to Frank (*Frank was the Divisional President – the RVP’s boss*) about how the campuses are managing this by instructor. So at the close of business on Friday 5:00 this week and every week thereafter until attrition comes in line with budget, I will need the following info follow instructions below and I recommend you use the FY10 SPR report and your July FY11 SPR, and Campus Vue Instructor Attrition Report. (*Translation: You are losing more students than you should be. Obviously your instructors are to blame therefore we want you to treat them in the same way that we treat admissions representatives who do not enroll enough new students – that is by monitoring how many students drop from individual teacher’s classes on a weekly basis using the reports listed above and taking appropriate action against offenders until attrition is at a level which is acceptable to the corporation.*)

## **WEEKLY**

- Picture of an up to day (sic) Instructor Attrition Board (*Translation: a whiteboard showing instructors’ names and attrition statistics usually displayed in the staff room.*)
- Inspire shops in NW folder on all instructors to be completed on all instructors by month end. (*Translation: ‘Inspire Shops’ based on the idea of mystery shopping whereby a observer shows up unexpectedly in the classroom to confirm that the teacher is adhering to the tenets of the ‘Inspired classroom’ – the corporation’s notion of what constitutes interactive teaching. Observations to be documented and posted online.*)
- Identified program(s) with highest attrition
- Identified instructors with highest attrition – weekly written coaching session given, signed and scanned sent to me
- Run Rates by drops by instructors – allocated for month of September  
(*Translation: ‘run rates’ normally apply in sales, whereby employees are supposed to meet certain targets by certain dates, for example two sales per day. In the case of instructors this made no sense, as they did not have the possibility of increasing the population in their classes between terms.*)

- Number of weekly calls made by instructors for re-entries (*Translation: ‘re-entries’ are students who have previously withdrawn but wish to re-commence their programmes. A certain number of re-entries were required on a monthly basis to offset drops.*)

If we use this approach, we have the opportunity to insure (sic) we are meeting our run rates.

### **Emails 5 & 6**

This email, which came from the Director of Retention based at corporate headquarters, took a different, more supportive approach. Unlike with Email 4 (above) where I complied by following directions but did not reply, I felt comfortable responding to ‘John’.

#### **Email**

**From:** (Corporate Director of Retention)  
**Sent:** Thursday January 06, 2011, 10:51 AM  
**To:** Helen Dunford (Associate Academic Dean)  
**CC:** (Campus President, Regional Vice President)  
**Subject:** Retention Plan

Good morning . . . I wanted to reach out and see what assistance I can provide in helping you build an action plan with the goal to improve retention – I prefer the positive term but the bottom line is to keep more students in our schools and to find ways to encourage more to return and finish their program of studies. The first step would be the development of a plan put to paper – I have attached one that the Old Ville team created that can be used as a model though I know you have the added challenge of degree students. Let’s set a date next week for a call to discuss what we can do moving forward – we can discuss a course of action and if my presence there would help, I’d be happy to re-visit Newtown. Let me know your thoughts.

Happy New Year,  
 John



## Email

**From:** Helen Dunford  
**Sent:** Thursday January 06, 2011, 11:28 AM  
**To:** (Corporate Director of Retention)  
**CC:** (Campus President, Associate Academic Dean)  
**Subject:** Retention Plan

Thank you John.

We can always improve performance whether it be in retention, placement or any other area. For this reason I am more than happy to cooperate both with the proposed discussion and retention plan. I would, however, like to point out that retention has improved, year on year, on this campus. As of December 2010, we were 0.6% better overall than 12 months previously. Given that over the past several years, we have attained better results in quarters 3 and 4 than in the first 6 months of the year, I have every reason to believe that we can finish the year even more strongly. I have already mentioned to both you and Angela (*the corporate Director of Education*) that I believe the budget of 3.6% (as compared to 5.5% the previous year) to be unrealistic and unreasonable. Discernible improvement, however, is both entirely reasonable and attainable. (*Translation: a budget of 3.6% means losing no more than 3.6% of the total population over the course of a month. If the population at the beginning of January 2011 was 600, the goal was to keep drops below 22 total. The previous year the budget had been 5.5% which meant that dropping up to 33 students was acceptable. No one disputed the fact that we should aim to improve but the need for such a big improvement presented a daunting challenge.*)

With very best wishes,

Helen Dunford  
Academic Dean

## Data Set 4 – Interviews with Faculty Members

### Interview 1 ‘Josh’ March 4 2011

1. **Helen:** So Josh, how long have you worked in the for-profit sector?
2. **Josh:** *About a total of eight years.*
3. **Helen:** And have you ever worked in the public sector?
4. **Josh:** *No.*
5. **Helen:** In the proprietary industry, what do you see as your main responsibility as an instructor?
6. **Josh:** *To help students succeed and retention.*
7. **Helen:** Does one take precedence over another? Does one objective appear to be more important in the eyes of the Corporation?
8. **Josh:** *Absolutely! That of retention.*
9. **Helen:** That of retention. So do you think, do you agree with that?
10. **Josh:** *Personally of course, I understand what the nature of our business is and our business model. Of course that does need to be of significant concern. However I think that too often the retention number is on the short sighted side because it ultimately is our students as students and graduates that will determine the success of the organization and um I think that too often the retention goals are just short term and from that we hurt ourselves down the road.*
11. **Helen:** Thank you. Um, so thinking about retention, what in your view of the main reasons why students drop?
12. **Josh:** *Not having the ability to cope with the life challenges that they face, um - granted some of the choices they make prior in life give them greater obstacles than myself or others may be facing at this juncture, um but again I think that many of our students are just simply ill-equipped, um either they've not had the training, or the guidance or if they perhaps just have a like maturity to deal with the obstacles and are very ready to quit rather than problem solve or kind of toughen up and you know bite the bullet to work through the obstacles.*
13. **Helen:** So that's very interesting because I suppose my next question would be to what extent do you feel able to prevent them from dropping if the reasons for dropping are largely to do with the students themselves not having the resources or the skills to cope?
14. **Josh:** *Of course it depends on the student and their degree of personal challenges, um I do feel that with probably most of the students we do have some control, um you know because again we can motivate them, we can work with them, and help them to make better choices. The real challenge is that again I don't have one student at the time. I have*

*a classroom, I have curriculum to cover, and I only have so much time and energy to devote to a student in assisting them with their personal challenges and motivating them, and sometimes it's not enough and I have to make a choice of do I put my time and energy into one, or do I focus on the larger group and I believe it's part of my role as instructor is to focus on the larger group.*

**15. Helen:** Okay so um which is say that more students drop for non-academic reasons or for academic reasons?

**16. Josh:** *Nonacademic reasons certainly.*

**17. Helen:** Nonacademic reasons.

**18. Josh:** *Um, as far as academic reasons they don't feel they can succeed or they just simply don't understand the material I would think that's much, far more rare because again that's something that I as an instructor can work on, you know work with them and build so...*

**19. Helen:** Indeed. So if you are asked, in this industry were very often asked to classify describe explain categorize reasons for dropping, are you familiar with the attrition spreadsheet um tracker I think it's called where we put down the reasons why students drop?

**20. Josh:** *Yes.*

**21. Helen:** The one that we turn it on a monthly basis. Um, in your view or opinion, and I don't expect you to have, you know empirical data to hand, but what impression - in terms of the impression you have, what would you name as say three major reasons - sort of life obstacle reasons why students drop out of class?

**22. Josh:** *Uh are some of them the three going from the minor side where um they're just sick not feeling well and again this is going to um not being ready to confront challenges or work through it, um, lack of childcare, or um lack of transportation or ability to get to the work, um and then also probably you know just not having the money whether they need to work to pay rent or again any money for the transportation is what I would say I feel are the most common reasons students do not attend classes...*

**23. Helen:** If I'm right, um illness or ill health, lack of day care, and transportation, yeah, so...

**24. Josh:** *Finance situations...*

**25. Helen:** So how fair is it to hold instructors accountable for drops in general and in particular people who drop for the reasons you described?

**26. Josh:** *Not - not a very high degree I'll be honest. Um yeah with, with the, with the daycare and the sick that does fall into the motivation category, um but as far as the counseling category, um in helping them to problem solve in their life and giving them suggestions - who else can watch their child and other scenarios, um, but ultimately it is*

*beyond our control. We can, we can make effort, we can make good effort, we can make strong effort but you know we can't force the students to take action.*

**27. Helen:** Now you worked as an instructor and a program director so you supervised other instructors, so, I suppose I'm interested in to what extent do you think it might actually affect performance of an instructor, um knowing that he/she will be held accountable for drops that he/she may not feel able to prevent?

**28. Josh:** *Performance in the classroom - negligible, I mean you know certainly as an instructor, I do feel the pressure and stress but in the classroom the focus is the material, the focus is teaching the students and engaging it's not really an opportunity to think about the retention pressure. Um how it affects the employee the instructor that would be something I would say has much more of an effect overall because again it is, it is stressful being, the feeling of being held accountable for something that is in many cases simply beyond your control.*

**29. Helen:** So, um, do you think that a sense of not being able to influence whether a student stays or goes um in a program might actually inhibit an instructor from fully participating in say a school campus-wide retention effort? I suppose what I'm saying is have you felt helpless to the degree that you almost want to give up. In other words, it's, there's no point in me doing anything so I'm not really do anything, I'm just going to teach my class the best I can and leave the retention to figure itself out.

**30. Josh:** *To a degree yes, there is a feeling of helplessness, um but again as an instructor, I can control my actions so as far as participating in retention efforts, calling students passing out um referral forms, um, you know whatever the case might be, uh, you know that that's my behavior that I can control and engage in it even though I may not believe the behavior is going to have a successful outcome, I still would just having the pressure of retention numbers would be motivated to work towards that.*

**31. Helen:** So as a supervisor of instructors, um, what would you do if it were in your power to make the decision, what would you do to motivate your instructors to engage more in the retention effort? Is there something that you would do, um to...is there some way that you could facilitate more buy-in or participation from the instructors in the campus wide retention effort?

**32. Josh:** *Certainly, my focus would not be on individual instructors, uh, I would focus on making sure the instructors were well educated on how our business model works, um the outcomes and benefits if our retention rates exceed a certain level or if we have good strong retention, um I would certainly not want to put focus on an individual instructor to say the negative outcomes will be bad for you...rather package it as this is how all of us are impacted negatively with retention so...it's a team effort and we're working together versus just the one.*

**33. Helen:** So if we took it one step further, and you were the Corporation, and it was up to you to determine policy that might affect not just your campus but other campuses, is this something that you might do differently? Given that the objective would be to um to encourage instructor buy-in and, and participation in retention efforts rather, rather than discourage it, is there something that you might do even in terms of policy to make retention strategies more effective?

**34. Josh:** *I would make the retention strategies more of a - you know - a positive orientation than, than that of a negative or a punishment, um – you know - again certainly you educate everyone on the campus the importance of the outcomes for everyone if we don't, if we don't meet our retention goals, um what I would really focus on the positive, that if we do as our campus population grows or remains stable or is within whatever standard the benefits of that, and certainly deliver on those, uh again and I, I would do away with firm uh retention percentages and again because I think that those numbers are to be honest completely useless. We, we have our students... I'm not a number and a number can be manipulated but people cannot and so it's not accurate or I feel, appropriate to set by whatever standard of calculations say retention should be at, this number or this percentage and be that as set in stone.*

**35. Helen:** Thank you Josh. That's very helpful.

### **Interview 2 ‘Andrea’ March 9 2011**

**1. Helen:** So Andrea how long have you worked in for-profit education?

**2. Andrea:** *Nine, ten months.*

**3. Helen:** Have you ever worked in public education?

**4. Andrea:** *No.*

**5. Helen:** Oh, OK. Um...I know that you mentioned once that you worked in...um worked for other businesses and I was intrigued by something you said about a comparison you made and I just wondered if there was anything that...um...anything that struck you as interesting, you know comparing this particular - you know - private operation with other private businesses or corporations you've worked for.

**6. Andrea:** *The thing I find interesting here is the lack of communication, um, I just found out last Friday that my raise is based on how many guest speakers I have and how much professional growth and nobody had told me that and I've been here almost a year ...so clarity would be - I guess - one of the things I have missed working in this organization...not to say that anyone did that on purpose but it is something I noticed.*

**7. Helen:** Um, in the proprietary industry, so in this for-profit context, what do you see as your main responsibility as an instructor?

**8. Andrea:** *I think the education of my students, not only in um, the skills areas of expertise that I have – you know - pharmacy technician, but also to educate them about being good people and giving back to the community, um...and trying to have as good a life as they can for themselves and others around them that they are responsible for.*

**9. Helen:** Uh huh. OK. Thank you. Do you think that your employer also sees that as your main responsibility?

**10. Andrea:** *No!*

**11. Helen:** Then, what do you think your employer sees as your main responsibility?

**12. Andrea:** *Keeping the students in class.*

**13. Helen:** OK. Fine. Thanks. Um...here's an interesting one based on what you just said, but, how is your performance evaluated, as far as you know, how is your performance evaluated?

**14. Andrea:** *Formally, I still haven't figured all that out. Informally, I can tell by, just by my peers, what they hear from...that we may share - - um, conversations I may have with them.*

**15:** OK, so what I can do is give you more information about the review thing and we'll talk about that later...um...right...what I can tell you is that 35 percent of your annual review is retention, in other words the retention part is, has a 35 percent weighting so a third of your overall review is based on how many students you retain over the course of the year in your classes, or we can flip that coin over and say "attrition" because it's actually the attrition rate that they measure. So, given that I'm telling you that – that that's the most heavily weighted item, do you agree with that?

**16. Andrea:** *No.*

**17. Helen:** Why? Why not?

**18. Andrea:** *Because I can't control people's life circumstances. I can't control their serious illnesses. I can't control when somebody realizes that there's another career path for them. I don't want to hinder that, I'd encourage them to do what's best so...*

**19. Helen:** Well actually, you, you've answered my next question, um, already which is what are the main reasons why students drop and you've mentioned health and just different career choices and ...

**20. Andrea:** *And there's also economics unfortunately for some.*

**21. Helen:** OK, so what I'm getting here is that most students drop for reasons that are beyond the classroom, beyond your control as an instructor. OK. Um, so to what extent do you as an instructor feel able to prevent students from dropping?

**22. Andrea:** *I can show them that it's a good career field to be in with lots of growth and despite the economic conditions it continues to grow and you can get a living wage out of it and that it opens the door to a lot of other educational opportunities. Lots of RNs start as pharmacy techs', lots of pharmacists start as pharmacy techs, so this doesn't necessarily have to be the end but the beginning of a career.*

**23. Helen:** OK, so let's say the student is in a position to...is receptive to that sort of encouragement, that's one thing isn't it, but what if the student is suffering from, or, um, the student's circumstances are those that you alluded to earlier, like ill health or whatever, financial circumstances, do you feel able to prevent them from dropping in those circumstances?

**24. Andrea:** *If I can provide a support mechanism, if that's what they're lacking, then sometimes I can influence that but unfortunately economically or health wise, you know...*

**25. Helen:** So, how fair do you think it is to hold instructors accountable for that?

**26. Andrea:** *I don't think it is.*

**27. Helen:** Actually, it occurs to me, I should ask you, how do you think you should be evaluated? What would be fair?

**28. Andrea:** *Mm...I think that if you had a course syllabus that outlined everything you were supposed to accomplish and you didn't accomplish or you accomplished all those things, that would be one way of evaluating what an instructor was capable of doing. Um ...I think attendance is a part of it.*

**29. Helen:** Why?

**30. Andrea:** *If you're motivating them in the class and they need to be there to learn, they'll attend.*

**31. Helen:** Mm. OK.

**32. Andrea:** *And maybe the hours they log? As long as that's not falsified you could use that but the actual hours they log, from when they arrive, you know spending extra time with students...*

**33. Helen:** Right.

**34. Andrea:** *...or doing those extra things, that's a good measurement too. I certainly think there's the "above and beyond category". People should be validated for everything they do outside the classroom.*

**35. Helen:** OK, well thank you very much.

### **Interview 3 'Joan' March 15 2011**

**1. Helen:** So the first question for you is how long have you worked in for-profit education?

**2. Joan:** *Uh – three and a half years?*

**3. Helen:** OK.

**4. Joan:** *Almost four.*

**5. Helen:** Have you ever worked in the public sector as an instructor?

**6. Joan:** *Um...no.*

**7. Helen:** I usually ask that because it's interesting if people have a point of comparison. Some people do. So, let's talk about the proprietary industry. Um...what do you see as your main responsibility as an instructor?

**8. Joan:** *The students learning the material to enable them to move forward with their lives and have a good job and be responsible for themselves. I also feel it's a good thing to teach them how to be professional. Many of them don't know how to do that. Uh...but basically, you know the basics of the education and then the soft skills.*

**9. Helen:** Very good. Thank you. Now, um...does your employer see that as your main responsibility?

**10. Joan:** *I used to think so. I don't think so currently. I think things are...things are seeming more to me like an Intel corporation type of business than...which I worked there for 15 years so I have kind of...*

**11. Helen:** So what do you mean by that?

**12. Joan:** *Um...the...uh...mm...how do I put it? The "higher ups" who are not on the ground with what the company does make decisions based on numbers rather than based on what we started out being.*

**13. Helen:** OK. So in the case of an instructor, what kind of numbers are they looking at?

**14. Joan:** *Um...attrition.*

**15. Helen:** OK.

**16. Joan:** *Basically and you know, numbers getting in. My program's very small.*

**17. Helen:** So, can you tell me how your performance is evaluated?

**18. Joan:** *I am evaluated through measurement and...*

**19. Helen:** Of what?

**20. Joan:** *Measurement of my teaching and there's student evaluations and faculty evaluations...not my peers but management, um, evaluates my teaching and makes sure that I'm teaching within the parameters of what the company sets down.*

**21. Helen:** Um, but in terms of say an annual review, what do you think is the biggest factor that would influence whether you get a pay raise or what degree, what level of raise you would get?

**22. Joan:** *Oh what's that thing called that I never know it is and it's got a lot of points attached to it?*  
(Both laugh)

**23. Joan:** *It has to do with numbers and attrition and...*



**24. Helen:** OK. Yeah. Yeah. So what are they counting?

**25. Joan:** *They're counting whether or not I have students that leave the program and they're not really paying attention as to why.*

**26. Helen:** So, all right, that's interesting, you made the comment they're not really paying attention as to why. Do you agree with being evaluated in terms of numbers and attrition from your program? Do you see that as fair?

**27. Joan:** *Um...mm...ten percent, yes, 90 percent no. I think it comes into it. I think that if a teacher gets lazy and just lets the students willy-nilly come and go, do whatever they want and what-not, um, that that's bad but on the other hand, there are many circumstances where the teacher has no control over a person moving out of state, a person's, you know financial – um – situation changing so that they can't get to school, childcare issues. I mean there are just a plethora of reasons why the...that the instructor has no control over.*

**28. Helen:** Well actually, that was my next question, what are the main reasons in your opinion why students drop?

**29. Joan:** *Um, well mostly my students drop for financial reasons, or moving or some of them were never motivated to begin with to be here. They start strong and get bored... other things get in the way...their family gets in the way...people draw them back into the mire, as I put it. Um...*

**30. Helen:** So when you say "financial reasons", what do you mean?

**31. Joan:** *Oh perhaps they had a little part-time job when they came to school and they figured that that would continue when they were at school and pay their bus fare or gas to get here and that changes or their childcare situation changes and they have to move you know the children from something that's fairly inexpensive like a family member to, you know something that's not inexpensive anymore and they can't afford it. Um, yeah, those are some of the big ones. And then just the whole people...letting other people getting in their way, getting in the way of their own success. Allowing family members and friends to pull them back and not being strong enough to, to pull their bootstraps up so to speak.*

**32. Helen:** Is that because the family members don't want them to go to school or are simply not supportive?

**33. Joan:** *Not supportive.*

**34. Helen:** That's too bad isn't it?

**35. Joan:** *Yes.*

**36. Helen:** So tell me, you've given me a number of reasons why you think students drop. To what extent do you as an instructor feel able to prevent them from dropping?

**37. Joan:** *Through counseling I believe I play a role in helping them see...um...perhaps by being quite frank in a gentle sort of a way...um...what I see from the outside looking in*

*that is preventing them and having discussions with – you know – about “well, you came here because and OK now we’re half way through and you’re so close and why is this going to get in the way?” Um, as far as, you know, I have no control over money issues, I can’t help them with that, but, um, some of the family issues I feel like I can help.*

**38. Helen:** Is there any way that you can sort of estimate I mean, let’s say, do you think, do you think that you have genuine control over a quarter of the students who drop or half of them or only like one in ten? I know that’s hard, I just wondered what your impression was as to how successful you can be as an instructor?

**39. Joan:** *I’m trying to think back to the ones that have left in the last year. I think I don’t have much control at all! I think maybe I don’t have about 70 percent of the control. I think there are so many other things...*

**40. Helen:** So with seven out of ten there are like other circumstances and try as you may there’s nothing you can do.

**41. Joan:** *There’s nothing I can do. Yeah.*

**42. Helen:** So given that, how fair do you think it is that the corporation or the school will hold you as an instructor accountable for drops?

**43. Joan:** *I think it’s very unfair. I mean, I think that there’s a certain amount of accountability that’s you know that we’re held to but I don’t think that it should be as big of a chunk of our measurement.*

**44. Helen:** Well thank you very much.

#### **Interview 4 ‘Kristen’ March 15 2011**

**1. Helen:** So Kristen, how long have you worked in for-profit education?

**2. Kristen:** *I am entering my second year April, come April.*

**3. Helen:** OK. Thank you. Have you ever worked in the public sector?

**4. Kristen:** *I have not worked in the public sector as a teacher. I have coached for public high schools.*

**5. Helen:** OK. Thank you. Um, in the proprietary industry, what do you see as your main responsibility as an instructor?

**6. Kristen:** *My main responsibility...(5 second pause)?*

**7. Helen:** It’s a hard question.

**8. Helen:** *Well a few. Obviously the main responsibility is to make sure that I am providing them with the quality of education depending on the subject matter...making sure that I am teaching them the information that they need to know but also obviously one*

*of the main responsibilities that we have is to make sure that we know what's going on with our students and to make sure that if they are not in the classroom that we can find out where they're at.*

**9. Helen:** OK. Um...so do you think your employer sees that as your main responsibility or I guess what I'm, um, what I'm driving at is do you think that as an instructor you and the corporation agree as to what your main responsibility is?

**10. Kristen:** *Yes. I would think that they agree that the main responsibility obviously is the teaching and the quality of education but also I do know that for example with retention and losing students I know that that's very important and that is also part of the instructor's responsibility so you can't lose sight of that.*

**11. Helen:** Oh OK. All right. Thanks. How is your performance evaluated?

**12. Kristen:** *My performance, and I have yet to have a performance evaluation – a professional one - but my performance right now has been evaluated through, uh, the "Inspire" training and the "Inspire" observations so I've had people come into my classroom and observe me as instructor. I also know that my performance is evaluated on retention ratings. I'm pretty sure.*

**13. Helen:** So have you had, um, if this is your second year if you've had one performance related raise...

**14. Kristen:** *I have not because this is my second year but it'll be my first year in July full-time.*

**15. Helen:** OK.

**16. Kristen:** *And since July or prior to July I was part-time so I just got the - uh - per class per term.*

**17. Helen:** Right, but you're right about a major part of the evaluation being the retention.

**18. Kristen:** Yeah.

**19. Helen:** Numbers...um, so do you agree with that?

**20. Kristen:** *Not really. Yes and no. There's, I think there's definitely, there's pros to it but I think there's a lot of cons to it when you evaluate someone's performance based on, for example the retention rate part of it just because there's so many circumstances out there that cause a student to drop out and there's no way that a teacher can be held responsible for some of those reasons. For example if someone is automatically dropped because they went to jail or because they died or they lost their job or they, I mean there's only so much that an instructor can do to help each student especially when we're responsible for so many, and it puts a lot of pressure on the teacher to try and track down these students who, maybe this wasn't the best place for them and I think that takes away from helping students that really could use the time because we're spending so much time on students that we're responsible for saving but in – realistically – we have no control whether we can save them or not.*

**21. Helen:** Well, that's very interesting because you've really addressed the next two questions. Uh, what are the main reasons why students drop and you gave some...there may be others that you'd like to mention. And then the next questions going to be to what extent do you feel able to prevent them from dropping given what you perceive to be the main reasons why they drop.

**22. Kristen:** *In all the students that I've had drop, I would say that almost all of them, I don't know how I could have prevented it. Maybe there was a reason; maybe there was a way that I could have prevented it, but I don't know how. There's...looking at each drop that I've had, I have no idea how I could convince them that moving to their family in Texas should wait or is not important and obviously I know the drops that I one hundred percent couldn't prevent like going to jail and you know losing your home and there's no way that I could lose sleep over that because I, if you got a disease and you're in the hospital I can't control that or you go into premature labor, I can't control that.*

**23. Helen:** So, given what you've just said, how fair is it to hold instructors accountable?

**24. Kristen:** *I don't think that it's very fair. I see, I do see the reasoning but I, there's too much, there's too much weight put on it I guess.*

**25. Helen:** Um...

**26. Kristen:** *There's a lot of weight put on it.*

**27. Helen:** Does it motivate you to perform better? Will it motivate you to perform, better if you know you've been held accountable for students dropping?

**28. Kristen:** *I don't think...I've never blamed students dropping on my performance as a teacher...so no.*

**29. Helen:** OK. OK.

**30. Kristen:** *I've never thought that if I would have taught a little bit differently here, that I could have saved that student.*

**31. Helen:** Right, I understand what you are saying. Well so finally, you did say earlier that you had done some coaching in the public sector, um, so are there any things that strike you about the difference between public and private, the for-profit and the not-for-profit public education system?

**32. Kristen:** *I know there's differences but from my experience I coach volleyball at a high school and that's where I've had a lot of experience at and with high school. It's a similar population as to being in the downtown area. We have low-income families. We have families that are, I mean barely making ends meet and their kids are in school. Their kids are going through a lot of issues. I've had players that have been expelled because of drugs and that kind of stuff so the population is very similar, but the education system strictly looking at it from that point and not the athletics that...I don't really know what the huge difference are.*

**33. Helen:** OK. Yeah. Yeah. I don't know to what extent the instructors are held accountable for students who drop out. That I don't know but uh...

**34. Kristen:** *I don't know with high school. I mean high school's slightly different because I know that in other educational settings - the for-profit or not-for-profit - that teachers are not...their performance evaluation is not based off of that, it's based off of their evaluations from students.*

**35. Helen:** Right.

**36. Kristen:** *But if a student drops, they drop, it's not really thought of...*

**37. Helen:** Which would you prefer if you had a choice?

**38. Kristen:** *I would prefer not. I would prefer having a system in place where you can talk about why these people dropped and really come up with a plan of how you can prevent why these people are dropping rather than it doesn't matter why they're dropping because it really doesn't matter why. It's just a strike against you but nothing has been resolved with that because we can't stop, we can't prevent people from dropping if we don't know how to prevent it.*

**39. Helen:** Absolutely.

**40. Kristen:** *And we're not really talking about how to prevent it. We're talking about strike one, strike two, oh "there's another one!"*

**41. Helen:** Thank you.

#### **Interview 5 'Alex' March 29 2011**

**1. Helen:** OK Alex, so it's 3/29 (March 29<sup>th</sup>) today. I've got about 10 questions, so I'll just start with the first one and I probably won't say very much because I'm interested to hear what you have to say (*laughs*)...I'm not going to comment so the first question is, how long have you worked in for-profit education?

**2. Alex:** *Since the fall of 2008 when I was hired here.*

**3. Helen:** So that's just over two years.

**4. Alex:** *Yes, it'll be three years this fall.*

**5. Helen:** Oh, so have you ever worked in the public sector?

**6. Alex:** *Well, I was a public school teacher prior to coming here. Is that...?*

**7. Helen:** Yes, yeah, that's really what I mean. So tell me...I have to ask you a follow up question now. Most of your co-workers, their response to that one would be "no" but as you've got experience of public and private education - um - and I know the answer to

this could go on for a few hours, but briefly, what are the major difference that strike you between teaching in a public school in New York and teaching in a...

**8. Alex:** *Well, in public school there seemed to be a lot more at stake because of the “No Child Left behind” regulations and there was a lot more emphasis on student performance, on tests and there was always somebody breathing down your neck as to what you were teaching and how this was going to benefit the scores on the test and how everything was geared in that direction (...) lesson plans had to be approved (...) faculty meetings went over what you were doing and how this was meeting the educational standards of that stage...*

**9. Helen:** Gosh!

**10. Alex:** *And how you say, OK (...) what standard’s this essay reaching out to that’s the state, school standards. There was a lot more pressure, a lot more regulation (...) you know, we have to pass these students otherwise there’s going to be repercussions for the school. There was just a lot more at stake, a lot more pressure, a lot more worry.*

**11. Helen:** Interesting! So really teaching here, you’ve had more autonomy?

**12. Alex:** Yes.

**13. Helen:** Oh!

**14. Alex:** *It was such a dream come true because I can focus on just the pure academics and just use some imagination and some creativity, which is why I got into education to begin with. It was so much more stifling in the public schools but here I was able to really stretch my wings and actually do what I wanted to do in the first place and have some success with it.*

**15. Helen:** Right, well that’s very interesting. OK, so focusing on the proprietary industry, what do you see as your main responsibility as an instructor in this school?

**16. Alex:** *Uh, preparing my students for the jobs that they’re going to be facing when they graduate from here. As an English teacher I need to do whatever I can to bring their writing skills, their writing level up to an acceptable degree. Um, when some of them come into my classroom, they can’t string a sentence together without making a series of errors and I do what I can over the 12-week period and the 90 minutes I see them each class period to try to strengthen that and get them acquainted with what they need so when they are working, their writing skills won’t hold them back.*

**17. Helen:** Right.

**18. Alex:** *And they need to understand that the writing skills are just...it’s the core.*

**19. Helen:** Right.

**20. Alex:** *It’s how others perceive them and judge them on paper so...*

**21. Helen:** OK, good so, you see your major responsibility being preparing your students for the workplace, but what do you think your employer sees as your major responsibility as an instructor?

**22. Alex:** *I...my perception is...it's, it's that, at the core, at the base that's what I'm hired to do. That's the job I'm hired to perform, but it's also to serve the interests of the school as a business by keeping students, by keeping their attrition rates as low as they possibly can...and doing what I can to work in that direction. So it's a weird juggling act; which is more important, do I spend all my time calling students and getting them back in the classroom, or preparing classes and grading the papers I have each week? It becomes a struggle sometimes.*

**23. Helen:** Yes indeed. So tell me, as far as you understand, how is your performance as an instructor evaluated?

**24. Alex:** *There's observations and then there's student feedback every other term and I believe it's those elements tied to the numbers game...what's my retention like and how many students are there in my classes? So I think it's both. I'm not sure which...how the weighting works...*

**25. Helen:** Yeah, you're right about those things. Actually, um, on your annual, the annual review that leads to your raise the retention is weighted more heavily than any other aspect. Um, so, having established that, do you agree with that?

**26. Alex:** *I understand the logic behind it but I think the reality of it is more unfortunate because I can control what I do in my classroom, what kind of work my students do and how to present my lessons but retention I feel it like a roll of the dice. There are some things that are completely out of my hands that I can't control the outcome of. Students drop out for a variety of reasons which, either it's none of my business or I can't affect change positively or negatively on them. My hands are tied. It's just an area where I feel more helpless.*

**27. Helen:** Well, that would lead very nicely on to the next question which was, as far as you can tell, what are the main reasons, if you had to come up with three or four, what are the main reasons why students drop?

**28. Alex:** *Uh, there's so many. I'm trying to think of the ones that I see more often, um, I think students idealize school a little bit, especially those who've been out of school for a long time and they have a preconception or perception of what it's going to be like and they see the reality...well it's not Animal House on cable TV, that it's actual...there's expectations and you have to produce and you've got to be here and it's very structured and they don't, they can't adjust to that and it scares them away. Or things just happen in their lives; someone's been incarcerated, some have been made homeless and school has to take a back seat to family issues and other issues in their lives. School has to be in the back seat. And what can we do about it? "You have a sick kid, you have a kid in the hospital? Well, never mind that. Come to school and sit in class so we can get our numbers up. It just becomes this absurd, absurd gambit.*

**29. Helen:** Well, and that brings me on to my next question; to what extent do you actually feel able to prevent students from dropping?

**30. Alex:** *I think I like to believe I can affect it more than I actually can. I don't, I mean, I can make the phone calls, talk to them, I can - you know - maybe give them all the warm fuzzy things to hear so their self-esteem isn't hurt by either class performance or what else goes on in the classroom. If I can help them in any way, I can get them to class. Of courses there's going to be some issues that like I said, school is going to have to take a back seat for example who cares what their teacher has to say when I have to put food on the table?*

**31. Helen:** Well, given that there appear to be circumstances that aren't in the instructor's control, how fair do you think it is to hold the instructor accountable for students that drop from the class?

**32. Alex:** *If it's strictly a numbers thing, well you lost six students, well does it matter that three are incarcerated, two are homeless and one of them moved to Arizona? No it doesn't matter what the reason is. You lost six. That counts against you. I don't think that's fair or reasonable at all. It's not fair if I can't affect the outcome of it. It's totally out of my hands but I'm still being held accountable. If there's nothing I can do to change it then that's not...*

**33. Helen:** Does it motivate you to perform better – uh - knowing that you're held accountable for drops?

**34. Alex:** *It, it doesn't. It motivates you to spend the lion's share of my time getting excited at the job. It's just like - you know - the psychological principle... You try and try again. You learn that no matter what you do, it doesn't make any difference or result in any kind of outcome that's positive so how long do you keep trying over and over again and expect a different result? So at some point you have to draw a line in the sand and just say "look, OK, this isn't working but this is the thing that I can do and I can...bring about a positive result. If this area isn't producing the results I wanted, there's got to be a different way to do it.*

**35. Helen:** Thank you very much.

### **Interview 6 'Cindy' April 13 2011**

**1. Helen:** It's April 13th and this is my interview with Cindy. Um so Cindy, my first question is how long have you worked in for-profit education?

**2. Cindy:** *20, over 20 years.*

**3. Helen:** Oh gosh and have you ever worked in the public sector?

**4. Cindy:** *I taught at Lake Oswego Junior high for two years, uh, back in the early 60s.*

**5. Helen:** So having had experience in the public and the private sector, are there any specific differences that come to mind?

**6. Cindy:** *It's hard to compare them because public school is so many years ago and it was like when I first graduated with my college, my teaching degree. So I was very young*



*and then so I started teaching here in 1988, then till now so, um, the public school experience was, um, so long ago it's really hard to compare.*

**7. Helen:** Hard to say. Okay well thank you. Now in the proprietary industry, what do you see as your main responsibility as an instructor?

**8. Cindy:** *To prepare the students for the jobs that they are seeking and to give them the knowledge and the confidence to do that.*

**9. Helen:** Okay thanks. Does your employer also see that as your main responsibility?

**10. Cindy:** *Somewhat. Um, most of the time yes and there's some circumstances where um there might not be a lot of support if the student is um a little bit outside the norm.*

**11. Helen:** And why do you think that is?

**12. Cindy:** *Because of the responsibility the administrator has toward the company rather than um supporting....supporting me.*

**13. Helen:** Okay all right. Um how is your performance evaluated?

**14. Cindy:** *It is often, um, observed and numbers for retention is one of the big numbers which is frustrating because I do very, I go out of my way to make sure the students are communicating with me so that I have the best chance possible of retaining them. However, um, I don't feel like I have a lot of control over that.*

**15. Helen:** So in a way you've answered my next question, which is do you agree with the way you are evaluated?

**16. Cindy:** *No.*

**17. Helen:** Well that's covered that! *(laughs)* Okay in your opinion what are the main reasons why students drop? Give me three or four reasons.

**18. Cindy:** *Sure...financial, um health reasons, personal reasons would be the main thing.*

**19. Helen:** Okay.

**20. Cindy:** *Uh, not ability.*

**21. Helen:** Okay.

**22. Cindy:** *Uh, I think it's very rare that they would drop because of ability.*

**23. Helen:** So to what extent do you feel able to prevent them from dropping?

**24. Cindy:** *I don't have any control over their personal life or their health or their family issues so I'm frustrated because I don't have any control over that.*

**25. Helen:** Okay so thank you. And then finally how fair is it to hold instructors accountable for drops?

**26. Cindy:** *I don't think it's fair at all. There's a great amount of stress for us instructors and I think that takes away our focus on doing a good job in the classroom. It takes a lot of time to prepare a good lesson, which is interesting and it takes away when we need to um...*

**27. Helen:** So I suppose I do have a follow-up question: that would be it sounds as though being held accountable for drops does not motivate you...

**28:** *No.*

**29. Helen:** What does motivate you to do a better job?

**30. Cindy:** *When I see the success of the students and the compliments that they write on their evaluations...*

**31. Helen:** Ah yes, yes obviously. Thank you very much

**32. Cindy:** *You are welcome.*

## **Data Set 5 – Letters of**

### **The Resignation Letter I Never Sent**

I got up early one morning and composed this letter. I had originally intended to hand deliver it to my supervisor at the vocational college, but never actually did. It is written, for obvious reasons, in American English.

*February 27, 2011*

*Dear Ms. Parkinson,*

*It is with regret that I feel compelled to tender my resignation as Academic Dean.*

*As I feel I can still be of service to the campus and am willing to devote time and energy to resolving certain regulatory matters and preparing to hand over to my eventual successor, I am offering to work one month's notice. Therefore, my final day of employment will be March 31 2011.*

*I am copying this letter of resignation to the regional Human Resources Department and Regional Vice President of Operations, Daniel Dodgson, as I believe it is important to make the reasons for my resignation known.*

*I recognize that an important position such as Dean of a proprietary campus is bound to carry with it attendant pressures. I have worked under such pressure for more than 9 years in my roles of Associate Dean and Academic Dean. However, since Jennifer Johnson retired, certain events on this campus related largely to the way in which we have been managed both regionally and at divisional level have created such duress for my team and me that the excessive stress has had a detrimental effect on my health.*

*These events include deliberate decisions such as the setting of attrition and retention targets with no regard for historical data or local circumstances while at the same time removing the student entrance tests that measure the minimal levels of literacy and numeracy required to be successful in college level courses. While expecting discernible improvement is more than reasonable, to ask a campus with an attrition budget of 5.8% (FY2009), and 5.5% (2010) to attain 3.6% in the current fiscal year is both unreasonable and demotivating. When this budget was set, unlike in previous years, input from the College President and Academic Dean was completely disregarded. The decision to give all campuses in the division the same target regardless of historical and physical circumstances or the number and nature (i.e. modular or linear) of the programs offered was described to me as “an experiment to see what happens”. (Linear programmes are traditional quarter-based courses lasting 12 weeks while modular programmes are intensive in nature. A comparison of campuses offering mainly one or the other suggested that students were more likely to complete the shorter courses. Thus modular campuses generally had better retention outcomes.)*

*I am dismayed to think that my staff and I have been victims of such an experiment that has created pressure and despondency in equal measure. A logical examination of the empirical data would suggest that the most fair and effective business decision would have been to expect the same degree of improvement that occurred between 2009 and 2010 where the campus went from 5.7% to 5.1%. Had we been asked to strive for a target of 4.5% this would have seemed entirely reasonable. Instead, even though we are (year to date) performing better than in 2010 (and this despite the disarray in our Admissions*

*Department and a diminishing population owing to poor enrolment numbers), I have increasing pressure on me to “treat instructors like under performing admissions reps with run rates and the like . . .”. This quotation is taken directly from an email I received from the former RVP. It is typical of frequent comments and remarks that display a lack of understanding of the linear, as opposed to modular, campus. 12 of our 14 programs are linear. Fewer than 10% of our students are in modular programs. We have one major re-entry point every quarter and an extremely limited re-entry opportunity at the mid-term owing to restrictions on the number of courses we can offer. Setting instructors a run rate on a monthly basis would be patently absurd given that the population in their classes cannot increase once the ADD/DROP period is over. (‘ADD/DROP’ was a two-week period of time during which new students could enrol in a class or drop a class without charge.)*

*In my 9 years at the campus, we have introduced a number of new programs. These decisions, to the best of my knowledge were made at corporate headquarters with little or no consultation and in some cases against the advice of staff members including myself. Two such programs, the Computer Information Science and Business Degrees, have proved to be expensive to run, undersubscribed and a drain on resources. They have also presented severe retention challenges. Recent gainful employment concerns beg the question, “why are we not teaching these programs out?” (It was known at this point that the Obama Administration was planning to release regulations regarding the need for private career colleges to better prepare students for gainful employment or risk losing access to Federal Financial Aid. There were growing concerns over the number of students unable to find work or repay student loans. Legislation was actually passed in June 2011.)*

*The only new program to be introduced that can be described as successful is the Pharmacy Technician Diploma. It is successful mainly because we redesigned it at a local level and persuaded the corporation to permit us to reduce it to a manageable and financially viable 49 credits. Unfortunately this is an isolated instance of the campus voice being heard at the corporate level.*

*The decision to remove CPAT entrance testing was made in haste and is, in my opinion, to the detriment of the campus and prospective students. (CPAT stands for Career Programs Assessment Test. It includes tests of basic literacy, numeracy and reading ability.) I*

*participated in a conference call where we were instructed to cease entrance testing and instead, use the CPAT as a 'placement' test. I will not repeat the text of the letter I wrote to Candy Smith about this decision in its entirety but suffice it to say that the CPAT is not a placement test and was not designed to be used as such. Also, the fatuous argument that "community colleges don't have entrance tests" should be qualified by adding, "but they do have a wide range of developmental courses and resources dedicated to placement testing and advising". We have one hard-working, part-time tutor who cannot possibly address the needs of all those students whose language and math skills do not reach the required minimum. I received no response to my letter of protest other than a one-line acknowledgement, which did not address any of my concerns.*

*Another 'academic' decision that is of great concern to me is that we are being compelled to increase campus revenue by scheduling all mid-term starts in 12 or more credits. I have been in education for more than 25 years as an instructor, teacher trainer and administrator. I have the expertise to make decisions regarding the academic welfare of my students. Given how vulnerable our mid-term starts prove to be, it is not in the interests of all but a very few to expect them to complete the equivalent of a full-time 12-week program in only six weeks. This is the equivalent of six hours per day, which exceeds the contact time of a modular program. There are many students for whom this is not a pedagogically sound decision and being asked to schedule students in such a way in order to resolve the campuses 90/10 challenges suggests that business interests are being placed before those of the students. (The college operated on a quarter system with terms starting four times per year in winter, spring, summer and autumn. New enrollments were admitted with every new term – unlike in a traditional college with new intake at the beginning of the academic year only. New students were also permitted to start in the middle of a quarter. By so doing they committed to doubling the number of class hours required per week in order to complete their courses by the end of the term. These intensive courses were not ideal for all students, particularly those with academic challenges. In order to lessen the burden on students who were mid-term starts, we would deliberately schedule them for fewer courses – two instead of three or four. This appeared to be working. However, when the corporation realized that it was in danger of violating the federal stipulation for at least 10% of its income to be cash revenue – as opposed to Federal Financial Aid, it decided to resolve the problem by directing us to automatically schedule mid-term starts for more courses, and thereby increase their cash payments. This led to*

some students struggling to keep up with the intensive nature of the classes and either failing or withdrawing.)

*The above issues regarding the academic calibre of students together with unreasonable and demoralizing retention targets are but two of many concerns. They are not the only reason why I consider my position to be untenable. Over the years I have been on the receiving end of what I consider to be verbal threats conveyed to me by successive college presidents from regional management. They take the form of statements such as “You can’t go over 40 drops this month.” “Don’t you dare drop any more this month.” I once attended a presidents’ conference call where the RVP asked the question, “If I told you that you have to make this target or else, what would you do?” My President responded that there was nothing else she could do. I have been told frequently of regional managements’ displeasure at the number of students we have dropped. I have always resisted breaking the rules in any way simply to meet targets but this kind of verbal bullying takes a toll on one’s mental health. It is also totally at variance with the tenets of the ‘positive reinforcement’ our instructors are required to utilize in the classroom. As a motivational technique, positive reinforcement is demonstrably effective. Why then is negative reinforcement used to manage us?*

*To compound my discomfort at working under significant duress, it has also been brought to my attention by present and former staff members in several departments that there have been certain inconsistencies with regard to the recording and reporting of graduate placement data. I will not elaborate here but will say that I have reported all pertinent information regarding these matters to LaToya Parkinson and do not know if they have been addressed or resolved. If we add to the above the arguably questionable practice of enrolling students with felonies into programs where their employment possibilities are extremely limited, the challenges appear insurmountable ...*

#### **The Resignation Letter I actually sent**

*Dear Ms. Parkinson,*

*I hereby tender my resignation as of March 31<sup>st</sup> 2011.*

*Yours truly,*

### **Data Set 6 – Logging my Persistence\***

After resigning, I had a brief period of unemployment and then found another job with a private university. This time I would be working with students in bachelor's degree and MBA courses. I had high hopes. Unfortunately, things began to go awry shortly after I arrived. My supervisor left the campus suddenly and I found myself at odds with the younger managers of other departments who, in my opinion, sometimes made questionable decisions.

\*(‘Persistence’ was the word used by my new employers to mean the same as ‘retention’ on my previous campus. The word ‘retention log’ was commonly used to refer to retention records.)

#### **July 5<sup>th</sup> 2011**

*I arrive on the campus full of hope. This is a university. They have integrity. I will not be dealing with the at-risk population who caused me so many challenges in my previous position. More importantly, I will not be judged according to the ‘R word’ (retention) and neither will the faculty I will be supervising. My new boss likes me and I like her. She is bright, out-going and funny. I knew I had interviewed well because of the haste they showed to hire me. Everyone I spoke to; the woman who was to be my boss, her “dotted line”, \* the Dean of Academics at the larger campus 150 miles to the north and the Provost of the University with whom I had had a very enjoyable telephone conversation, all declared that they had been impressed by what I had to say. I was wanted and welcomed.*

\*Dotted line (manager): This expression apparently comes from the concept of Matrix Management (see, for example Tim Hindle in The Economist, October 23rd 2009, for an overview of Matrix Management) but in my experience, though it was used in the hierarchical organizations where I worked, it was never explained, and an assumption was made that we all understood what it meant. It refers to a manager who has some responsibility for your work – usually because his/her area of expertise is related to your job – but is not your actual supervisor. Hence ‘dotted line manager’ as opposed to ‘line manager’. A ‘dotted line’ generally works with you remotely, via email or phone. I have had ‘dotted line’ managers in addition to my immediate supervisor in both corporations where I have worked in the US. They were based somewhere off campus, either at another campus or a home office and purportedly had expertise in academic matters (though in both cases their real expertise was in managing student retention). Strictly speaking, a dotted line manager works in an advisory role and does not have authority over you. However, in reality, it simply felt as if I had two supervisors because this person was more

highly ranked within the corporation and if he/she asked me to do something, I could not question it.

*My new supervisor sits me down in my new office with a pile of faculty files and asks me to “sort them out”. I am comfortable with this task, as I know from experience what the various regulatory bodies expect to find in terms of faculty documentation. Also, this is what I have been hired to do; manage the professors.*

*I am excited.*

### **July 6<sup>th</sup> 2011**

*My boss tells me that I need to visit all the classes this week to welcome the students to the new semester. That’s new. It means I will have to stay late every night as the classes are in the evening. She apologizes for the ‘tweak’ in my schedule. My partner won’t be pleased, as she doubted I would be able to stick to the schedule I had been promised.*

*We visit the graduate classrooms together and my boss announces that I am to be the new ‘Graduate Advisor’. Hang on! She told me I would not be in the ‘front line’ with the students. After so many challenges on my previous campus, this promise had attracted me to the job. So I am to manage the faculty and advise the graduate students in addition to having to stay late every night at the beginning of every two-month session.*

*I am mildly irritated by this but won’t let it destroy my optimistic mood.*

### **July 7<sup>th</sup> 2011**

*I have seen very little of my new boss. Her door is closed most of the time. I have made progress with the faculty files and each of them now has a list on the front cover of the missing items. Surprisingly, quite a lot is missing including required documents such as transcripts. Well, that is why they need me. I can take care of this. I have received a large number of emails giving me user IDs and passwords for operating systems and databases. So far I do not know what any of these programs is for. I expect someone will explain it to me.*

*I am puzzled but not worried.*



### **July 8<sup>th</sup> 2011**

*My new boss comes into my office and apologizes for not devoting much time to me. We sit in together on a conference call with her dotted line, who is to be my dotted line in due course. We laugh, joke, and comment how nice it is to be working together. I learn that the following week I am to travel 150 miles north for training. That's good because in my first week I have had no training or orientation to company policies or procedures and I have no clue what all those operating systems are for. So far I have nine different passwords all for software I don't know how to use.*

*I am Okay about this.*

### **July 12<sup>th</sup> – 2011**

*I don't know what to make of my new co-workers. There are 17 of us in total on the campus, not counting the faculty. This is half the number we had in my previous job. I realize that three of us have started within two weeks of each other. The other two new staff members all seem to have personal connections to the boss. Is this a happy coincidence or slightly concerning? One of them, the Student Success Coach, is a woman who has no experience of working on a college campus or undergraduate advising (the main responsibility of her job). However, she is highly intelligent and appears to be quick on the uptake. I like her immediately. She is baffled by her job initially as she has received no training. She has simply inherited a collection of disorganized binders. Her supervisor, the new manager of Student Central (which comprises Student Services and Student Finance) has a background in the construction industry. He admits to me that our boss had told him "show up for the interview and the job is yours". His experience in education is very limited. This strikes me as an incongruous appointment.*

*I am a little concerned.*

### **July 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup>**

*I head north for training. I arrive at our much larger sister campus and am impressed. Everyone is very welcoming. I am looking forward to learning what all those databases are for. I am handed my schedule. I have 14 meetings in two days! I proceed from one meeting to the next - meeting and greeting various campus employees. Everyone talks a lot.*

*I'm not really processing much information. No one actually shows me how to do anything or talks about my job. They talk about themselves; what they do. Some of this makes sense to me. Some of it is less than clear because I don't recognize the context.*

*After the first day of 'training' I head to a very mediocre hotel (my former employer wasn't this cheap!).*

*I have a headache.*

### **July 20<sup>th</sup> 2011**

*Back at my own campus, I haven't seen much of my new boss. Her door is still closed most of the time. The undergraduate success coach and I have discovered that we are responsible for the academic appeal process whereby any students failing to meet required standards have to appeal against dismissal. The process is far more rigorous than in my previous place of work. This pleases me. The ease with which we accepted academic appeals - even those with no supporting documentation - always bothered me. This is laborious though. We are not really sure of all the steps, neither is our boss. One of the students I am supposed to call regarding unsatisfactory academic progress is the boss's daughter. I only realize this when I call the student's home number and hear my boss's voice on the answerphone message. I tell my boss. She says she will "take care of it". I don't know what that means but it troubles me.*

*I am starting to feel that things are not as they should be.*

### **July 21<sup>st</sup> 2011**

*It is week three of the session. This is when I expected to stay late to observe classes. I visit a number of classes briefly and I am impressed by the standard of teaching and calibre of the faculty. I need to return to my office to get more observation forms. When I enter the reception area I encounter two visitors. It is 8:00 pm at night. They do not look like students. They introduce themselves to me; one is my boss's supervisor from out-of-state, the other is from HR. I don't understand why they are here. I proceed to my office and almost immediately my boss comes in. She says, "I won't be here tomorrow". I reply, "Oh, are you taking vacation?" She says, "No, I'm never coming back. I've been let go". My instinct is to hug her. She is upset. I don't ask her why but she volunteers "You would be astonished if you knew why they have fired me". She says she is really sorry and leaves.*

*I am stunned.*

### **July 22<sup>nd</sup> 2011**

*Our corporate visitors return to the campus. My former boss's manager meets with each of us individually. I have never met him before. He asks me about my background and tells me that he spent some months in Germany with the U.S. Air Force sharing a base with 'Brits'. He is affable and reassuring. I tell him that I have received no training and am quite confused about my role, policies and procedures and operating systems. He makes notes, which suggests to me that he will take care of my professional needs soon.*

*I am hopeful.*

### **July 25<sup>th</sup> 2011**

*Rumours abound regarding the departure of our Campus Director. It is alleged she has committed a number of regulatory offences. It seems it is a good thing she has gone. I find these rumours disturbing because I had left my previous employment partly owing to reservations about questionable campus practices.*

*I am disappointed.*

### **August 10<sup>th</sup> 2011**

*I still haven't received any formal training though several people at our sister campus have called to express sympathy for the challenging situation I have to contend with. The campus feels increasingly dysfunctional and I really don't know what I am doing much of the time. Even though I bring considerable experience in education to this job, the programmes are different, the procedures are different, the demarcation between roles is very different; staff who would normally have reported to me in my previous job report to someone else who doesn't appear to know very much about education. Some of the staff intimate that they would rather I were their supervisor as they are receiving very little guidance or support from the gentleman with a background in construction.*

*I am baffled.*

**August 17<sup>th</sup> 2011**

*I remark to one of my co-workers that the campus feels like a rudderless ship. One of my fellow managers suddenly announces that she has been assigned the duty of 'Acting Campus Director'. I am totally mystified because it seems like such an unlikely (albeit temporary) appointment. I'm not too sure how I feel about being 'managed' by a 29 year-old with apparent unbridled energy. I decide, however, to wait for the official announcement, which never comes.*

*I wonder . . .*

## **Appendix B: Additional Data not Included in Final Selection**

### **Narratives of Self as Other: Data Related to Feeling Marginalized**

#### **The Beginning of the End**

**Written December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2012, recounting events of January 2011**

My narratives are not in chronological order. Even though this is the first narrative, it seems fitting to document how my career in proprietary education came to an end because of a pivotal moment when I realized that I no longer cared sufficiently about keeping my job to pretend that I belonged in this environment. At this point I truly regarded myself as set apart, which is why this piece belongs in “Narratives of Self as Other”.

*Of all the duties I was tasked with, ‘riffing’ people was the least pleasant. Riffing comes from R.I.F or ‘reduction in force’ and means laying people off because it is no longer in the company’s financial interests to continue to employ them. Try as I might, I could not see beyond the personal repercussions for the staff member concerned to the business decision behind it. However, I understood that once the corporation decided to eliminate a position, nothing I could do or say would save the individual and therefore all I could do was treat the redundant staff member with as much clarity and sensitivity as possible and in that manner retain my own job.*

*In January of 2011, I was summoned to the President’s office to participate in a conference call with the Regional Vice President (RVP) - whose job was to oversee a number of colleges in the region - and a corporate representative from Human Resources. I wondered if I was in trouble. These were people of elevated status with whom I rarely communicated directly. I soon realized that the matter in hand concerned a colleague of mine. She had done nothing wrong – quite the opposite in fact. She carried a diploma program single handedly by teaching all 20 hours per week of classes, advising and tutoring the students individually and being responsible for all related administration and retention. She worked long hours and her students adored her. The corporate office had scrutinized our monthly salary bill and decided that costs had to be lowered. The way to do it was to ‘bring us in line’ with other colleges owned by the corporation by cutting this person’s salary in half.*

*If this had happened in my first year of employment, I wouldn't have questioned the decision despite any personal misgivings. I would have feared for my job and my medical insurance. But this was not my first year, and hardened by cynicism, I felt relatively brave. In the most pompous voice I could muster I replied, "And what, may I ask is the justification for this?" The Regional Vice President's voice came over the phone line "In all the other schools instructors in this diploma teach 40 hours per week. You can't afford to pay anyone to advise and tutor students. It's too expensive. She only has enough students to teach for 20 hours so that's all we can pay her to do."*

*Earlier in my career with this company I would have sought a diplomatic response – for example, "Well, it will be tough but I understand the business reasons for this." However, after years of outwardly understanding but inwardly rejecting business decisions, I had had enough. I chose my words carefully and delivered a diatribe "That's insane. You are insane. This decision is to the detriment of the students. No decent school anywhere in the world would ask an instructor to teach for 40 hours per week and expect quality instruction. Mary works extremely hard. She provides excellent support for the students. By only paying her to teach and halving her salary you will not only demoralize her - and make it very hard for her to survive financially - but you will be doing the students a great disservice." My lexical choices were contrived to distance myself and my views from theirs. 'Detriment' and 'disservice' were not commonly used words on my campus. My corporate colleagues preferred business jargon.*

*The reaction to my comments was an eternity in coming. I thought I heard a sharp intake of breath on the phone line. My president wriggled uncomfortably in her chair and gestured at me to 'shut up'. I sat stony-faced waiting. The RVP spoke "That's the way it is. Take care of it." I remained silent. Then the HR Rep spoke "We all have decisions to make and yours is whether you choose to cooperate or not." It was a warning.*

*I wondered for several days afterwards whether I would be disciplined for my remarks. The fact that my President did not mention the phone conversation made me wonder whether she secretly sympathized with my point of view. I told Mary about the decision to cut her hours in half and remove all but classroom teaching duties and she cried but assured me that she did not blame me and understood why these business decisions were made. She said she was worried that her students would suffer and didn't know if she*

*would be able to pay her rent. Even though I expected my verbal resistance to have consequences, I felt no fear any more for my job. Right up until the year before, I would have worried that I might be fired and would have agonized over the danger of unemployment. Now, however, I felt defiant and indignant. “Let them fire me!” I said to my colleagues.*

*This was truly the beginning of the end. Two months later I resigned.*

## **Narratives of Resentment and the Suffering Body: Data Related to Feeling Unhappy in my Work**

### **Point of Departure**

**Written April 2011, after my resignation, recounting an incident from January 2011.**

To understand the following piece it is necessary to know what I mean by the ‘Mood Elevator’. The Mood Elevator is an attitudinal scale produced by corporate trainers and publishers Senn-Delaney. The idea is that one checks where one is on the Mood Elevator (i.e. in a negative or a positive place) before reacting to any incident in the workplace. The mid-point (or neutral place) on the elevator is ‘curiosity’. The explanation for this is that if you cannot be positive, you should at least avoid negativity by asking yourself “Why do I feel like this?” The Mood elevator was integrated into our management training and we were expected to remind ourselves of it in a crisis. We were given a laminated card with the various levels of the elevator on it to help us remember. Towards the end of my time in this particular job, I must have reminded myself of it daily!

The U.S. constitution declares that each state in the Union shall be ultimately responsible for educating its citizens. This means that individual states can determine which colleges and universities can operate legally within their boundaries and hold those institutions to whatever standards the state legislature thinks appropriate. In the state where I live, all degree programs must be initially authorized by a state department and then re-approved every two years. Failure to submit necessary documentation and pay requisite fees can result in a college being closed. Therefore, maintaining a good rapport with state authorities and meeting deadlines for program approval is important. In the conversation below, I talk with my College President about the fact that we have missed our deadline

and the best course of action is probably to call and apologize in the hope that we will get an extension:

*“I think I should call the State Board of Education about our approval documentation being overdue.” “Yes, good idea, but whatever you do, don’t use long words.” I stared incredulously at my supervisor and then composed myself (“Remember your Mood Elevator.” I said inwardly). Then, from an appropriate ‘place of curiosity’, I said “OK, I’ll keep it brief and to the point”. As the College President walked away I pondered the exchange. I had wanted to say “They have PhDs at the State. They understand long words. They don’t seem to have any trouble with the way I speak . . .” but I didn’t because it would have seemed petty, sarcastic. I decided to let it go and move on but obviously I am still smarting from the experience, as it became one of my first pieces of autoethnographic data.*

### **Dashed on the Rocks!**

#### **Written May 2011.**

The corporation that owns my former college holds an annual gathering every year to reward high achievers. Receiving an invitation to the event is considered a high honor and results in a deluge of congratulatory emails from co-workers all over the country. In 8 years of service to the college I had never come close to ‘winning’ in my category even though I had met targets and ‘bonused’ as a result. My colleagues and I felt that as an inner city campus with multiple programs and a larger population than sister schools in the region, we were unlikely to be in a position to compete as outcomes came down to net attrition percentages without factoring in any other variables.

In May of 2010 I was on vacation when I received an email from a colleague congratulating me for being on the winning list for the quarter. This news did not mean that I would be going to the ‘event’ but it did mean I was in the running and would get a plaque. I was actually quite thrilled. Heck! This was validation! About 3 months later I opened an email from the corporate office that had been distributed to the entire North American staff of several thousand. There was an attachment with the names of annual award winners. I opened the attachment in a distracted fashion, expecting to do my usual thing of scanning through it to look for names of people I knew and then consigning it to the trash. To my amazement, my name was on the list! I let out what can only be described



as a squeal, *“Oh my God! I won! I’m on the list!”* *“So you are! Good job!”* yelled one of my co-workers from his office. I stood up and cantered towards the Acting President’s office on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor stopping by the office of a friend on the way, *“I won. I’m going to the party!”* I said excitedly. When I got to the President’s office I stood outside waiting, as she was engrossed in something on her computer screen with another colleague. She looked up: *“I won.”* I said. She retorted immediately, *“Oh no, that can’t be right. That’s a mistake”* The look on my face must have gone from puzzlement, to bafflement to utter despondency in a split second. *“It’s a mistake,”* she said. I reflected. *“Well I did wonder – I know I won the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter but I didn’t think I’d won overall”*. At that moment the Regional Vice President of Operations who happened to be visiting the campus stepped out of another office into the corridor. In front of several co-workers and without looking at me she addressed my supervisor, *“Helen’s a mistake”*. She stepped back inside. I turned crimson and scooted away, back to the privacy of my office. I shut the door. The words *“Helen’s a mistake”* ringing in my ears.

And then the deluge of emails started: *“Yea! Way to go!”* *“It couldn’t have happened to a nicer person!”* *“Good job!”* *“Well deserved!”* I spent the next hour responding to well wishers explaining that it was an error. During that hour a further email arrived from the corporate office. There was an amended email attached. My name had been removed and someone else’s had been put in its place. There was no accompanying explanation and the email had only been sent to the parties concerned, not distributed to the whole organization. I guess it was left to me to let everyone else know that I was a mistake.

Later that afternoon the Acting President appeared in my office. She said how sorry she was about the mistake. She said that someone at regional level had submitted the wrong list of names. She was kind and caring. I thanked her but said I was upset, disappointed and felt that whoever was responsible for the error should be the one apologizing. She said she agreed. For several days I waited for the email or phone call apologizing for the error. It never came. Several of my co-workers came to see me to say how appalling they thought it was and how the corporation should *“make it right”*. I just felt angry and embarrassed.

There is a postscript to this story. One week after I had handed in my notice, the award winners for the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter 2011 were published. Once again my name was on the list.

Even though I knew my numbers had shown ‘year on year’ improvement, I realized I had fallen so far short of the revised, seemingly unattainable target for net attrition that this could only be an error. Knowing it was another ‘screw up’ and knowing I was leaving anyway, I dashed off an indignant sounding email to the Divisional Director of Education. I received no reply. Our newly appointed College President who was out of state at a meeting was made aware of the situation and called me to say that she was sorry and felt that someone from corporate headquarters should call me personally to apologize. I said I wouldn’t hold my breath. It’s a good job I didn’t. The phone call never came.

### **How I feel about ‘Execution’**

#### **Personal memory data about a campus experience, written March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2012**

*I was searching for something in the cupboard where I keep education related books when I happened upon a tome entitled ‘Execution’. My initial response was “What on earth?” I have never been a proponent of capital punishment and the title conjured up a number of unpleasant connotations. As I reached for the book with a view to examining and disposing of it I had a sudden ‘flash’ of recollection from the past. Of course, this was the book our Regional Vice President had ordered all the campus managers to read in September of 2009.*

As usual, we were not ‘performing’ as a team. Various departments had failed to ‘make their numbers’ for the month. This no doubt troubled the Regional Vice President, as she would be held accountable for failing campuses under her jurisdiction. During the morning I was summoned to the campus President’s office and told that as keeper of the campus credit card (a role I resented - particularly when it came to the complex accounting procedures required on a monthly basis), I was responsible for acquiring nine copies of Execution by Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan (2002) which I would subsequently distribute to all heads of department.

I duly found and purchased the books online opting to pick them up myself the next morning given the apparent urgency of the matter. When I arrived on campus with the books, we were told to report, as a team, to the President’s office where we were advised that we were to read the book - in our own time of course – (i.e. that evening regardless of how late we got home) and expect to be quizzed on its contents the next day. There was

more resignation than indignation; somehow no one was surprised. We always anticipated knee jerk reactions when our outcomes were inadequate.

The blurb on the cover said *“The book that shows how to get the job done and deliver results . . . how to close the gap between results promised and results delivered. The consistent practice of the discipline of execution.”* I remember thinking to myself *“Typical. This has nothing to do with education and everything to do with the bottom line.”* The book’s authors were acclaimed and experienced businessmen and corporate trainers. *“Oh yippee”* I thought.

The threatened quiz on the book’s contents never materialized. As with several previous initiatives, the book was never mentioned again (other than between co-workers moaning about having to read it and claiming not to have found it particularly useful).

Two and a half years later, however, it appears I did pay some attention to what I was reading as I found a page of notes about ‘The People Process’ - that is, how to motivate those you manage - tucked inside. Nevertheless, my overwhelming reaction to rediscovering this book was the resentment and hostility of one for whom it seemed to have no relevance then, or now.

### **Narratives of Sacrifice and Reconciliation: Data Related to Feeling Trying to Reconcile Myself to my Situation**

#### **My Efforts to Avoid Plummeting Down the Mood Elevator**

On the back of the aforementioned ‘Mood Elevator’ card we were asked to record a personal ‘I will’ message. In an attempt to reconcile myself to my situation, I wrote the following:

*“I will be less negative in my responses to policies and initiatives I cannot change or control.”*

## **How I Lost 15% of my Student Population in One Month and Received Career Advice from a Psychic Buddhist Monk.**

**Written July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012**

Five years ago in 2007 I had been in my position as Academic Dean for just over a year, having been promoted in January 2006. Life did not feel good. I spent long hours on campus dealing with serious student retention challenges. The college had decided to adopt an attendance policy for reasons mainly related to maintaining state approval. (The state required us to pro-rate tuition charges for students who did not complete courses, which meant we needed accurate attendance records.) This new policy meant that any student who missed more than two weeks of classes could be ejected from his/her course of study. The student population and college faculty and staff struggled to come to terms with the change. It was as if no one quite believed the new policy would be adhered to. That was before we started strictly enforcing it and dropping students in large numbers. Frequent offenders had got used to disappearing for significantly more than two weeks and then showing up again, invariably expecting instructors to devote time to helping them make up missing work.

In the first month after the new policy came into force, we lost 15% of the student body. This percentage was three times more than our usual monthly attrition rate. My boss who was generally a reasonable and supportive person had foreseen this catastrophe and ‘chewed me out’ on the phone for not being pro-active enough to prevent it. Perhaps she was right. I wasn’t too sure what would happen with attendance taking and so I probably waited too long before pressing the panic button and rallying the troops to track down the MIAs (*students missing in action*). That was a Tuesday afternoon. I remember being very upset and feeling as though I had been treated unfairly. I was not responsible for the rule change or the fact that the staff and students were having difficulty adjusting to it. I left my office on the verge of tears and went for a walk. I recall walking around the same city block several times before I felt sufficiently composed to return to work. Back in the office, I took out a list of student names with ‘LDAs’ (*Last Date of Attendance*) and counted 14 days to see who would have to go. I then picked up the phone and called every one of them. As usual, more than half the numbers we had on file were wrong or disconnected. We worked with a demographic of limited means and our students often had their phones and sometimes their utilities cut off. I don’t think I actually connected with more than half a dozen of the 100 or so missing students.

As the end of the week approached my feelings of trepidation at the thought of the Friday ‘retention call’ increased. It so happened that my boss was leaving the day before the call for a holiday so she would be spared the grilling she would have received as the campus president ultimately responsible for the numbers. She usually acted as the buffer between the various (campus) department heads and the regional management and kept us out of the line of fire whenever possible. I appreciated this very much. On this occasion, however, I was the one who would be reporting our disastrous percentages. I remember not being able to sleep on the Thursday night. I wondered if I would lose my job. I did, nevertheless, formulate a plan. I would call in the numbers in advance so they would be less of a shock to the person chairing the meeting.

The weekly retention calls were not exactly intimate affairs. The senior managers would get all the schools in the region on the line conference style and the campus presidents would be asked to present their ‘monthly outcomes’ to their peers. It was meant to be mutually supportive I suppose. In reality it felt like a punishment because if your numbers were good, you’d get hurrahs and applause. If your numbers were bad, there would be an embarrassing silence. Occasionally you’d hear a sharp intake of breath from someone who had forgotten to put his/her phone on mute. The ‘good’ schools got to go first. If you were doing badly that month, you would have to wait till last.

Anyway, I had decided that the only way I would make it through the day (the calls were always at 3:00 pm on Friday afternoon) without having a breakdown, would be to give the Regional Vice President a ‘heads-up’. This would afford him the opportunity to yell at me in private ahead of the somewhat more public afternoon call. I also assumed that he would prefer to know in advance what my worse case scenario was.

I picked up the phone to make the call at 8:00 am and received my first surprise; the RVP was also on holiday. That was a stroke of luck. He could be brutal! (I remember him once telling me that my numbers were “*disgusting*” and I should be ashamed of myself and threatening me with losing my job or having to get rid of staff. On that occasion the attrition was decidedly better than it was now.) I felt relieved that I didn’t have to deal with him on this particular occasion. In his absence I discovered that the Regional Director of Admissions (‘Barbara’) would manage the retention call. This was a woman I did not

know particularly well. Feeling increasingly anxious I picked up the phone and dialed her number:

Helen: *Hi, I'm sorry to bother you. I know you must be busy.*

Barbara: *No bother at all. How can I help?*

Helen: *I just wanted to warn you ahead of this afternoon's meeting that our retention numbers are looking terrible.*

Barbara: *Yes.*

Helen: *I mean – really terrible.*

Barbara: *What's your projection?*

Helen: *(Deep breath) 75 – ish.*

Barbara: *OK.*

Helen: *It's just that this new attendance policy has presented some challenges.*

Barbara: *It's OK. We thought that would happen. Thanks for the advance notice. Keep doing your best. You'll turn it around. Talk to you later.*

I was stunned. Stunned at how nice she had been. Stunned at how she (and the RVP apparently) had decided to 'cut me some slack' and stunned at how comfortable the interaction had been. Later that day I joined the conference call and was further gratified to hear her announce to the other campuses on the call that "*Helen and I have already discussed her numbers. They have a new attendance policy which is presenting some challenges*" and just like that I was off the hook. This woman had handled the situation in a very sensitive way. I wasn't used to this kind of response and it came as a surprise. It felt like an extreme act of kindness.

I wish I could say that the ensuing weeks and months also turned out better than anticipated. Unfortunately, the new attendance policy set off a period of intense activity for the entire academic department whereby teachers, department chairs and administrators were all expected to bombard missing students with phone calls, emails and letters in an effort to get them to return before they fell foul of the 14 day rule. The high attrition gradually decreased but it seemed as if we were engaged in a constant struggle to reach impossible targets and the word 'underperforming' was bandied about by upper management. We didn't necessarily disagree with attendance taking. After all, expecting faculty to work one-on-one with students who had been missing for several weeks created

stress in the classroom. Sending students away for the rest of the quarter – admittedly with the possibility of re-enrolling at a later date – seemed very reasonable. If only every student expelled from the college didn't count against us or impact the all-important bottom line.

A few weeks after this event, my partner (Lauren) told me that a client of hers had offered to arrange a meeting for me with 'Stephen', a Buddhist monk who happened to be psychic. Both she and her client thought he might be able to help me given the fact that my high level of stress in the work place seemed to be affecting my physical and mental health. (My doctor had increased the amount of medication required to control my blood pressure during this time and I spent every Saturday moping around the house in my pajamas not wanting to get dressed or do anything much. By Sunday I usually relaxed enough to function normally but by Sunday evening I would start to dread returning to work.) Anyway, at this point I was willing to try anything and consider any insight I might be offered, so we arranged to meet with Stephen in a local coffee shop. We arrived a little ahead of Stephen and his wife. We didn't know what they looked like but knew they were Taiwanese so assumed we would have no difficulty recognizing them. A few minutes after the agreed time, they walked in and greeted us. We offered them a beverage which they declined and we chatted for a few minutes about inconsequential matters (the weather, the traffic, where I came from in England).

Suddenly Stephen held his right hand up as if to stop the conversation, looked directly at me and said "*You are precisely where you are meant to be*". I didn't respond. I suppose I had wanted to hear something different – advice perhaps on how to fashion an escape from my place of work. He continued, "*You are learning about compassion. That is why you are in this job.*" I had composed myself by this stage and replied that a large number of the students I worked with certainly needed compassion owing to the serious challenges they faced in their lives. Stephen then turned toward my partner Lauren and picked up the previous conversation. He didn't say anything further about my situation or me. About five minutes later, he and his wife excused themselves, shook our hands and left. I was left pondering what he had said. I didn't know whether to be disappointed or reassured. I hadn't considered that staying where I was could be the right decision.

I stayed in that job for another four years.

### **The Persistence Plan**

After leaving the vocational college I found work at a private university. My experiences there are documented (see page 80 below). Unfortunately, I only lasted seven months in the new position but during that time I made a valiant effort to adjust to my new surroundings. This effort included investing time and energy in devising a retention plan. I actually sent the following email to my co-directors on the University campus two weeks prior to resigning. Ironically, in the seven months I had been there, I had been very successful in terms of student persistence (another way of referring to retention). I was also very sincere about my plan which represents the final attempt I ever made to reconcile myself to working in a for-profit college environment.

#### **Email**

**From:** Helen Dunford  
**Sent:** Wednesday, February 8, 2012 6:48 PM  
**To:** (Campus President, Director of Admissions, Director of Career Services, Director of Student Services, Student Success Coach)  
**Subject:** Campus Persistence Plan

Team Newtown,

As I mentioned this morning, I would like us to think of ideas between now and the next management meeting to incorporate into the **Campus Persistence Plan**.

Please consider the following:

1) As we are on the '**Top Improvement**' list, we are clearly doing something right! Please focus on recent changes or improvements in customer service or student support. *Can we isolate those practices which have occasioned this improvement?*

2) **Challenges to Persistence:** what, if any, are the obstacles to persistence? Do we have sufficient academic advisors to support our population?

*Are you aware of the reasons why students withdraw from the university?* Please be ready to suggest specific causes of attrition, academic or otherwise. Is there an efficient way of collecting and collating these data?



3) **Theory of Academic and Social Integration:** Vincent Tinto devised this theory whereby successful students are not only engaged in the classroom but have established social connections on campus – with other students, faculty or staff members. This does not necessarily mean organizing social events. *However, can we think of ways of making all students feel part of our community?* This is a particular challenge with students taking online courses.

4) **Seidman's Retention Formula:** This recognizes the importance of social and academic integration but goes one step further, thus:

**SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC INTEGRATION + EARLY INTERVENTION  
+ REMEDIAL SUPPORT = PERSISTENCE**

This addresses the most vulnerable of our students; those in their first session or semester who are twice as likely to drop as those who have completed their first year. It also recognizes a documented decline in the basic literacy and numeracy of newly enrolled students. *What proactive strategies can we employ to identify at-risk students and provide remedial support?*

Please ponder the above and be ready to discuss at the next management meeting. If we can answer the four questions above, we will have the makings of a persistence plan!

Helen

(Please note: none of the people to whom I sent this email either acknowledged receipt or responded.)

**Narratives of Pilgrimage and Quest: Data related to attempts to find an escape route.**

**Informational Interview at a Community College**

**Written November 2010**

In an effort to escape for-profit education I had applied for at least 12 jobs at the local community college. These included a variety of vacancies in student services, academic

administration and even faculty positions. I considered myself to be qualified – perhaps over qualified - for every one. I was shortlisted and interviewed for a Dean’s job but was turned down in favour of a candidate who had “*more community college experience*”. (This would not be hard as the sum total of my experience in community colleges in the U.S. was teaching one English as a Non Native Language course as an adjunct instructor.) In all of the other cases, I did not as much as receive an invitation to interview; just an email telling me I had been unsuccessful. Despite my partner telling me to “*give up, they obviously aren’t going to hire you*”, I persevered and when I realized that the community college would be opening a campus close to where I live, I emailed the Human Resources Department and asked for an informational interview with the person in charge. The reply I received was friendly and welcoming; the part-time administrator in charge of the small local campus, ‘Sue’ (herself a former dean) invited me to meet with her one evening the following week.

When I showed up for the meeting, I realized that the operation was very small (just a couple of courses) and that there would be no viable employment opportunities at that time. Nevertheless, I found Sue to be so friendly and accommodating that I sat in the foyer (there was no office space) and chatted about my aspirations. The conversation turned into a comparison of vocational education in the public and private sectors. I explained that I had always been drawn to the community college system because I found it easier to reconcile my philosophy of education and political views to public education. Nevertheless, it was not my intention to be adversely critical of colleges like the one where I worked and I went on to describe the many ways in which, in my opinion, the public sector could benefit from corporate practices - for example the high level of employee accountability when it came to student retention. I told her that I found it frustrating when candidates such as myself with extensive educational experience seemed to be passed over for internal applicants, probably because of some kind of snobbery or negative attitude towards private career colleges.

I was surprised at myself for being so candid with a person I had only just met, but then, what did I have to lose? I had already been rejected so many times that my previous strategy of virtually ingratiating myself in the hope of being considered for a job obviously wasn’t working. Sue’s response was refreshing. For the first time, in at least a dozen encounters with community college employees at informational interviews, and in

informal settings, she openly admitted that she and her colleagues regarded colleges like mine as inferior and suspected that they were only out to “*make money out of unsuspecting students*”. She said that she “*got a good vibe*” from me and was therefore willing to be honest with me and help me if she could. I conceded that I could understand - to an extent - why she and others held these negative views, particularly given the bad press the industry had received recently. However, I felt the need to defend my employers and co-workers and told her how much my team and I cared about the students and how we felt/were held accountable for what happened to each and every one of them. I contrasted my brief experience as community college instructor where I wasn’t even required to take attendance, let alone contact absent students, with my experience as a dean in the proprietary system, where I, together with the faculty was expected to track down and advise students who were missing class.

Sue reacted by saying that she was very happy to have met me because, based on what I had told her, she would henceforth view private vocational colleges differently and not assumed they were all “*tarred with the same brush*”. Soon after that we parted company after having exchange business cards. She promised to let me know if any suitable openings came up. She also advised me to try a new strategy when applying for jobs in future and instead of writing a standard letter explaining why I would be a good candidate, actually be more assertive or aggressive and say that I already knew my background would count against me. She said “*You almost need to defy them to take an interest!*”

I left feeling discouraged about the possibility of actually finding a job in the community college system but happy at last to have met someone willing to be honest with me about the negative perceptions within state funded education of for-profit colleges, and also willing to keep an open mind about changing her views based on my testimony. I suppose I should have felt resentful at her admission that someone “*with my background*” would “*never be hired*” by a community college in the present climate, but instead I felt grateful that at last someone had listened with an open mind and responded with brutal honesty.

### **The New Boss Arrives**

**Written October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

He seems like a nice man; an easy-going self-described ‘listener’. He has watched, waited and declined to pass judgment or make comments in his first week. He calls an all-staff

meeting and we gather in the reception area, which is the only space big enough for us all to sit in a circle. He tells us that he intends to say a few words and begins:

*“I’m a reasonable sort of guy. I like to listen. My door is always open. You can talk to me. All I ask is that you believe in our corporation. If you don’t believe 100 per cent in the corporation and what we are doing, this isn’t the place for you.”*

Everyone nods in agreement. I find myself nodding in agreement but I know I am thinking something quite different; I do not believe, at least not wholeheartedly in the way my co-workers seem to. I will never totally accept for-profit education and this place is so dysfunctional. How can I believe?

### **Grand Tour Mini Tour**

**Interview with My Partner on November 26, 2011 (based on Chang, 2008 p.175).**

The numbered questions are the ‘Grand Tour’ questions. The letters are the ‘Mini Tour’ questions prompted by the Grand Tour responses.

1. When you first met me in England, how did you perceive I felt about my work?

*“I felt that you were enthusiastic about your work but I also felt that you were concerned about the responsibilities that came with it. I think you enjoyed interacting with the students though you never seem to enjoy the bureaucracy.”*

a) What issues did I have with the bureaucracy?

*“I’m not exactly sure but I think you resented the time away from the academic side of your work.”*

b) Did I believe in what I was doing?

*“Yes though the organization that you worked for in the UK catered primarily for well-heeled students. And I think that you always recognized that there were less fortunate students who weren’t able to realize such educational opportunities. The educational trust*

*that we worked for was committed to furthering international communication and understanding by teaching students the English language. It was a charitable organization. At the end of the day the academic and pastoral experiences of students were paramount. The quality of the education, the standards of the faculty and administrators, were very high.”*

2. Did my attitude to my work change when we came to the United States?

*“Initially you were very excited about the opportunities in the United States. However working for a private educational institution was not what you expected.”*

a) Can you tell me more about that?

*I think it became apparent very quickly that private educational institutions, at least in the United States, were more focused on the bottom line than the educational experience of the students.*

b) Did I believe in what I was doing?

*“I think you always believed in what you were doing in the sense that you were trying to provide a quality academic program. I believe that you were also trying to provide good managerial and academic support for the program including the faculty and students. You always believe in providing a good quality academic experience. You always believe that learning has its own intrinsic value in addition to whatever subject matter the student is undertaking.”*

c) So why do you think I was so unhappy?

*“I think you resented having to compromise your principles and academic standards to suit the bottom line. Practically speaking the practices and policies of the schools that you worked for made it difficult for you to put the interests of the students first.”*

d) Did that have an effect on our relationship?

*“I believe that the policies of the school for which you worked caused you a lot of personal and professional stress. The policies meant that you had to short change your students and the faculty almost on a daily basis. Although you were the Academic Dean it seems that your job was really more about tailoring the programs of the school to meet the financial constraints of the organization's headquarters. I think it's very difficult for you to compromise your personal and professional principles, especially since you have such deeply held beliefs about the value of education and what it can do for the individual and for society as a whole. This constant need to compromise, or subsume your own standards and sense of what is right, inevitably made you unhappy and resentful. I spent a lot of time just trying to cheer you up, help you to feel good about yourself again, and help you to focus on the many, many students that you did and do help. Frankly, after several years of being a ‘cheer leader’ for you, it started to get hard on me too.”*

3. What did you feel about my decision to quit my job?

*“Although I was personally a little bit apprehensive about your quitting your job for financial reasons, I was very supportive of your decision to leave. I felt that the position that the school put you into especially with regard to your ethics was causing you such stress and unhappiness that it was affecting your physical and emotional well-being.”*

## **Appendix C: Third Party Validation**

### **Response to Helen's First Day - January 2, 2002**

#### **Written April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012 by my Supervisor**

*January 2 was the worst first-day-at-work day that Helen could have witnessed. This was the first day of the quarter, and there was a constant stream of students into and out of my office. Many of them came to change their schedules, and many of them came to relate the reasons for their potential suspension from school. These are the students who, as Helen related, were living in cars, had no money for transportation, and, in general, were just plain broke. Many of them were victims of spousal abuse, and some of them sabotaged their own success by not doing well. (What if I graduate and am still not successful?) Their parents generally were not involved in their lives, so they had no one to help them. This is the environment in which I had worked since 1984, so I was not shocked by the students' stories.*

*However, I could tell that Helen was quite shocked by the students' stories, and I was truly fearful that she might not return the next day. But return she did, and she and I worked together from 2002 until I retired at the end of 2005.*

*Our main goal, which was also the goal of the entire academic department, was to retain students so they could graduate and improve their lives, breaking the cycle of poverty. This was a laudable goal, and I'm proud to say that we succeeded in many cases. But the ones who didn't make it still break my heart.*

### **Responses to Narrative Data**

#### **Written December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2012 by my Spouse**

*Perceptions are an interesting thing. What Helen wrote is very much in accordance with what she had been expressing to me verbally. I think that she is probably correct in thinking that her (now former) co-workers found her a bit of a stick in the mud. I also suspect they found pedantic; no doubt exacerbated by her British accent. Americans love British accents, but in an academic, or other formal settings, they can be construed as "stuffy". Or "stuck up" as the Americans would say.*

*At the same time, her co-workers no doubt respected her, albeit grudgingly. Hence the role of “moral compass”. Helen’s role as an elder, mentor, authority figure, along with her British accent set her apart. Whether or not her co-workers’ perceptions of Helen as a stickler for the rules, and for what is right, had as much to do with their perception of her age, experience and “Britishness”, as it did the actual role her job description dictated.*

**Written December 29<sup>th</sup>, 2012 by “Mia”**

*I work in a public community college. I have two jobs there. I am an adjunct instructor, and I work as a writing tutor and advisor under a federal grant program at the college. I have been aware of proprietary schools in the U.S. since reaching adulthood, but was unaware of the exact nature of their services and policies until Helen began working for one. After reading and hearing about Helen’s experiences and thoughts about this type of education in the U.S., I have learned a great deal more about these for-profit institutions.*

*To be honest, I never really paid much attention to the difference in public and proprietary schools. I went to and graduated from a private two-year women’s college, a public four-year university, and graduate school. I had to pay for my education at each school and am still paying for my loans for graduate school, so the idea that some people choose and pay for an education at a proprietary school to get training or a certificate/degree in a particular field not offered at a community college or university, didn’t seem that strange or different to me. However, after learning about the mainly at-risk student population, the emphasis on enrollment numbers, student retention, business over education, and the high cost of the programs, I am very shocked and have conflicted feelings about this model of education.*

*I think my feelings are similar to what Helen has expressed in her autoethnography. Proprietary schools as another opportunity for education might not be as foreign to me as it was to Helen as I grew up in the U.S., but like Helen I have similar feelings and misgivings about the “corporate” nature of these “schools”. As a teacher, one of my main goals is to help students be successful in their learning. I know not all students learn at the same rate or in the same way, and for a few students an institutional education might not be the best option or the chosen field of study is just not the right fit. Therefore, when I read about how many at-risk students who seemed unprepared and/or ill-equipped for*



*success were enrolled in highly expensive programs, I was disgusted and felt like these students were being taken advantage of and treated as a “number” rather than a complex human being. On the other hand, I also see that these proprietary schools do have successes as Helen writes about her good numbers in retention and completions. Therefore, these schools do deliver in some way - they have students that graduate and work in their chosen fields. Yet, I wonder at what cost, as many others are encouraged to enroll and incur great debt, but do not have the skills or “tools” to complete their schooling or are overwhelmed with life challenges that prevent them from continuing their education.*

*I understand the importance of student retention and completion, but to run an educational institute like a business seems to me that money will always be put ahead of people’s needs and best interests (students, staff, and instructors alike). I am not sure how much Helen feeling as an “other” drives her emotions and conflicts about this model of education because I think many American educators and non-educators feel that education is a right and not a privilege for those who can afford it. Even at the community college level, I see some movement to a more business-like structure which scares me as I worry about what education will be left for students who can’t afford it or for those who don’t want to go into extreme debt when they do receive an education in the U.S.*

**Written January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2013 by “Jan”**

*I suppose first of all I should state that nothing surprised me in what you wrote. I have been aware of much of the content and the stress it has placed on you both morally and physically, even though I have not been there to experience the impact on you. The other thing is that I can’t help but make comparisons to the UK, which may not be relevant. Anyway, here are my thoughts.*

*The most overwhelming feeling I have is sadness:*

- 1. sadness for those involved as instructors, administrators and students;*
- 2. sadness that ‘bums on seats’ pervades the business;*
- 3. sadness that there are signs in the UK of a similar approach;*
- 4. sadness regarding the toll it took on you.*

*1. The most positive thing that comes out of your accounts is the resilience and caring that pervades education. Globally teachers and administrators face different challenges, yet most rarely fail to 'care' for their students. Yes, some become demoralised, demotivated and, indeed, leave the profession, but many stay and persist. (Persist in its true sense here, not 'retention'!) The saddest thing in your account was the bullying tactics used on staff, especially by the RVP on you (and the ridiculous 'execution' book). These often appear personal and vindictive and totally unprofessional. Your description about being 'on the list' was superb and reeked of incompetence. This incompetence risks pervading the profession as demonstrated in the lack of response, interest, engagement from the staff to your email pre the 'persistence plan' meeting.*

*2. 'Bums on seats' sadly is increasing in the UK. I see it all the time, especially concerning overseas students. These are rich pickings and students are enrolled who are not linguistically up to following degree or masters' programmes. Your reference to accountability on the part of academics is something we need more of in our higher education institutions. I imagine Bell set higher standards for its teachers several years ago than universities do today. 'Money for old rope' is also reflected in the wealth of seemingly dumbed down university courses to encourage students to enrol regardless of job prospects. Apprenticeships and practical courses have always been underrated and undervalued in the UK, much to my disgust. It will be interesting to see if the huge increase in student fees will have an impact on teaching standards in higher education. Based on your experience, it would appear not – students will live with life time loans as they are increasingly doing now.*

*3. We also have league tables which take no account of the social constraints on students and schools. No flexibility and variables can encourage a raising of standards and schools rise to the challenge, though this often is down to the individual head who also instils certain values, expectations and care and understanding. They combine setting standards with competence.*

*4. You have survived and perhaps as Stephen said have learned more compassion but it does seem to have been a very hard road to take.*

### ***The Abstract***

*This was very clear: treating education as a marketable commodity is unacceptable! I hope what you have written makes a difference to someone somewhere.*

*Perhaps the only thing I was surprised by was only the one reference to your accent as being academic sounding. I fear in the UK, an American in the same situation would have faced more cultural prejudice, albeit mostly behind their backs.*

*Reading Helen's narrative brought back a few happy memories (getting new jobs, one is always optimistic), but many more bad memories. Because we have the kind of relationship where we share what is going on in our lives (and Helen is talkative by nature!), I was well aware in "real time" of what was happening in Helen's work life. It was stressful for both of us. I have dual nationality, British (naturalized) and American and am familiar with education on both sides of the pond. While my first degree was taken at a very good, and expensive private US college, my MA was from a British University (not as expensive, nor as academically rigorous). Despite having availed myself of educational institutions in the US and England, I was not prepared for the priorities of the US for-profit system.*

*I can honestly say that I was continually shocked, and disappointed, with the overemphasis the American proprietary system places on the bottom line, rather than the academic needs of the students. I was also shocked at some of the stories Helen would come home with night after night of the kind of life that some of these students were living. Scenarios of shootings, violence, drugs and poverty all seemed to come up again and again. It took quite some time for Helen to develop a "thicker skin" so that she wouldn't take these tragedies personally, or try to "fix" these broken and battered lives. As her partner, I was concerned that at least for the first year or two, she would come home saddened, upset and dismayed with what she was seeing of life on the other side of the poverty line.*

*I think Helen was "othered" in many ways. From my perspective there were the positive sides of that. Attention (overwhelmingly positive) paid to her accent and vocabulary, for example. But I also feel that she was to a large degree always an outsider looking in. No matter how often and how hard she tried to throw herself into the private college or university for which she was working, inevitably their policies and practices built a glass*

*wall through which she could not pass. Helen was a part, but also always apart. Continually throwing herself against the glass wall resulted in bumps and bruises to her self-esteem, her physical and psychological well-being, and to a limited degree our relationship. Helen's choice to embark on this Ed.D, also was/is a stressor on our relationship. There was a bit of "otherness" in her home life too. I resented how many hours Helen had to spend at work over the past 9 years, I got tired of having to buck her up over and over again, and I grew to resent the time Helen would spend almost every weekend working on this degree when we had so little time together as it was.*

*However, how can I be anything but pleased and proud that Helen has persevered through so many personal and professional challenges to emerge with her dignity, sense of purpose, and sense of humour intact.*

## **Appendix D: Relevant Data Extracted from Delphi Questionnaires**

In 2010, I began a Delphi study of proprietary school teachers' views on student retention. Although the study was not completed, the first round of questionnaires produced interesting results, which I summarized in the document below. Of all the reasons given by the 31 respondents for students dropping out of college, only 2.6% were deemed to be directly attributable to the instructors themselves. Most of the reasons were, in the teachers' opinions, attributable to the students, or to external circumstances. In other words, the faculty members questioned indicated that they were powerless to prevent most student attrition. The data, though not fully processed or conclusive suggested that teachers felt unable to influence the retention for which they were held accountable.

### Student Retention Questionnaire

**In your opinion what are the main reasons for your students dropping out of their programs before graduating:**

Respondents: 31 (out of 40 = 77.5%)

Related to:

#### **Student**

Lack of planning/poor choices (3)  
Here for wrong reasons therefore lack motivation  
Over committed in personal life (2)  
Poor time management skills (2)  
Lack of self-motivation/commitment (4)  
Afraid to succeed  
Not academically prepared (9)  
Drugs (3)  
Lack of self-discipline/not willing to work hard (5)  
History of failure (2)  
Lazy/not committed (4)  
Lack of coping skills (3)  
Legal issues/jail/criminal record (3)  
Cannot get GED (2)  
Change their minds about wanting an education (2)  
Lack of confidence or self esteem

#### **Instructor**

Lazy instructors  
Instructors who do not understand mission of vocations colleges.  
Lack of positive reinforcement from faculty.

#### **External Circumstances/Involuntary events**

Family obligations/personal issues (13)  
Outside influences  
Unstable home environment  
Physical/mental health (6)

Not physically or mentally prepared to be in school  
Financial Troubles (11)  
Lack of daycare (7)  
Lack of transportation (6)  
Set up for failure by Admissions/Deans who permit enrollment/re-entry (5)  
Employment conflict (6)  
Relocation (2)  
Family illness (2)  
Credits will not transfer  
No support system at home or elsewhere outside school (3)  
Lack of advice/support from school

Total Reasons Given: 116

Total Reasons attributed to students: 47 (40.5%)

Total Reasons attributed to external circumstances/involuntary events: 66 (57%)

Total Reasons attributed to instructors: 3 (2.6%)

**Items Producing More Than a Single Response**

Family obligations/personal issues (13)

Financial Troubles (11)

Not academically prepared (9)

Lack of daycare (7)

Physical/mental health (6)

Employment conflict (6)

Lack of Transportation (6)

Set up to fail by Admissions/Deans who permit enrollment/re-entry (5)

Lack of self-discipline (5)

Lack of motivation (4)

Lazy/not committed (4)

No support system at home (3)

Lack of Planning/Poor Choices (3)

Drugs (3)

Lack of coping skills (3)

Legal Issues/jail (3)

Over committed in personal Life (2)

Poor Time Management Skills (2)

Cannot get GED (2)

Change their minds (2)  
History of Failure (2)

In the second round of questionnaires, I asked instructors how they felt about being evaluated according to retention percentages. Here is a selection of the responses indicating frustration at being held accountable for circumstances beyond their control:

*I can't provide daycare or transportation for students. I can't give students money.*

*I can't drive them to school!*

*I can't bring them to school every day or watch their kids.*

*I'm not a social worker.*

*I'm not going to go to their house and pick them up!*

*This is a school before a business!*

*I am here to teach – not babysit or be a psychiatrist.*

*I cannot force someone to do something they do not want to do.*

*I am not financially able to give them money for bus fare.*

*I am not in a financial position to support them.*

## Appendix E: Theoretical Memos Used for Writing Theory

### Theoretical Memos By Concept:

#### Othering

- 1) I appeared to be ‘othered’ in finding this situation unacceptable as the apparent manipulation I objected to was not always a concern for my American co-workers. For example, on page 61 when Alex refers to a “*weird juggling act*” between serving the interests of the school as a business and equipping students with the skills they need to be successful he acknowledges that this is what he is paid to do (“ . . . *that’s the job I’m hired to perform*”). His attitude is more one of acceptance than resentment despite the inherent challenges of the task.
  
- 2) There are ways in which I am ‘othered’ which are directly related to my coming from a different background and not based on philosophical differences. For example, the corporate visitor’s concerns about my seeming “*too academic*” because of my accent and my lack of familiarity with for-profit schools which would be shared by anyone from outside the industry regardless of nationality. I describe how I present myself for interview oblivious to the nature of the establishment and do not actually understand what ‘retention’ means in business terms. When I first meet the students I am shocked by the widespread poverty and social challenges they face. As the third party response from an American in public education shows I was not alone in being surprised by some of the practices in for-profit colleges.
  
- 3) Although there is, in my opinion, evidence of ‘othering’, some of which exacerbated my discomfort (for example the remarks about my accent), ‘othering’ did not appear to be the fundamental reason for my inability to adjust to my work environment. No doubt sounding different, resenting the long hours and lack of holiday time, being previously unfamiliar with the concept of for-profit vocational schools and other relatively superficial differences, all made reconciliation to the situation challenging, but at the heart of my disquiet there was the universal theme of whether or not it is really acceptable to sell education at a profit to vulnerable populations. When I moved to my second campus and found I could not relate to my fellow managers because of their age, business practices and the suggestion of nepotism in hiring practices, I was probably reacting in the same



way as many people would in similar circumstances. What set me apart philosophically however was that I could not believe “*100 per cent in the corporation*” as the new boss had demanded while my colleagues – as far as I could tell - had no such qualms. Nothing they said or did suggested that they were wrestling with Sandel’s concerns about morally acceptable markets. This differing view did not mean that they had no ethical concerns. It simply appeared to me that the notion of selling education in this particular context was acceptable to them.

4) Being considered overly academic no doubt contributed to my sense of ‘othering’. I did not have the right kind of experience for a public college but neither did I fit in a for-profit school where educational experience appeared to count for less than an ability to manipulate reports and meet sales targets.

5) This is the point at which my sense of being ‘othered’ fades into the background and the societal implications of my autoethnographic study come to the fore. I shared these concerns with co-workers, family members and friends who read and commented on my work. In this respect I am far from being ‘the other’. I am part of a society that finds certain practices within the proprietary industry questionable.

6) With regard to ethical challenges, far from being ‘othered’, many of my colleagues shared my concerns.

7) My interpretation of the data shows that I was ‘othered’ in certain cultural ways such as by accent and educational background. Originally I thought that it was these differences together with an inability to perform the demanding functions of the job that led to stress-induced ill health and voluntary resignation. However, it was my otherness in terms of philosophy of education that created the real tension between my working environment and me.

8) As ‘the other’ philosophically and ethically at odds with my employers and unable to reach required standards of performance, I became vulnerable to splitting and projection, receiving negative feelings from senior management and projecting them untransformed both onto coworkers and back to those who supervised me.

9) For me, the drawback of being removed from the context was outweighed by the huge advantage of being able to detach myself sufficiently to truly reflect on my role as self, ‘other’, participant and author.

10) I actually started looking for repeated words such as “other” but discovered that most occurrences were not related to the topic of othering at all.

11) I think I may see if using Excel to tabulate and sort helps at all. I need to start by looking for evidence of othering and scapegoating plus any other obviously recurring themes.

12) Although data relating to my experiences with the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service are not included in the final data-sets, I certainly recall a strong sense otherness when my movements in and out of the country were restricted by visa limitations and an even greater sense of grievance when my (same-sex) marriage was not recognized for the purposes of obtaining a Green-Card, thus restricting my employment opportunities. Even though I was a legal immigrant at all times, I still felt othered. I wonder if this should have been included... No I need to stay focused on the educational aspects on this research.

13) I realized today that I seem to be “othering” myself. Why did I refer to doctoral research when I met the RVP? Was it because it was pertinent or because I wanted to impress him? It was probably a combination of both. Even my emails seem excessively pompous. Am I trying to distance myself from my interlocutors by being (pseudo) academic? Or is it that I feel more confident in my views if they are expressed in an erudite sounding way? I think I should separate out instances of othering myself where I seem to have some responsibility for the outcome from being othered. For example, if I use pompous sounding language, that’s me othering myself whereas someone making assumptions about me based on my accent is being othered.

14) It shows, for example that the othering all seems to occur towards the beginning (both chronologically and in terms of the order in which the data sets are presented) whereas the questionable practices happen towards the end. The lack of control and institutional pressure spike around the middle (emails and interviews). Given my concerns regarding

othering and scapegoating, there are surprisingly few occurrences of either, relative to the other categories. This could be attributable to my selection of data sets of course, and the proportionately large amount of data in the email and interview sets.

**15)** The data begins with examples of my feeling othered but am I actually being othered by the actions of those around me or ‘othering’ myself? I certainly feel different but other than the isolated incident of the RVP commenting on my accent purportedly sounding academic, there is not much evidence of the campus community treating me differently. This ties in with my suggested original findings whereby I began as the supposed ‘other’ but ended feeling as though I was one of a group/team sharing concerns about what was in students’ best interests.

**16)** The early data sets focus on me as researcher-participant with my concerns about being othered, whereas the later sets open up in commonly held concerns and apportioning of blame.

### **Scapegoating**

**17)** Those at the highest levels of corporate management no doubt felt pressure from shareholders to return profits and employed the technique, described by Dunning et al. (2004, p.244) whereby negative feelings were projected to those beneath them in the corporate hierarchy. Middle managers then transmitted this negativity to their subordinates (see for example the emails from regional managers to me). By the time these ‘unbearable feelings’ reached me I was incapable of transforming them and perpetuated the situation by projecting them both to my staff and back towards those who supervised me. Dunning et al. (2005, p.257) claim that splitting and projection can develop into “*blame, demonization, scapegoating and bullying*” and there is evidence of this in my data. Faculty are blamed for student attrition (see the email regarding Instructors as “*underperforming admissions reps*”), but as with Dunning et al.’s case of subject leaders interacting with the school leadership team (2005, p.252) their response is to deny responsibility. In this case, instead of blaming management, they suggest it is the fault of another department (see Joan’s remarks about holding the admissions team accountable for enrolling unsuitable candidates).

**18)** From a personal viewpoint, I may have believed myself to be ‘othered’ when I was in fact scapegoated and my inability to transform unbearable feelings may have contributed to the stress that in turn, caused ill health and eventually forced me to resign.

**19)** I perceived that negative feelings about inability to meet corporate targets was split and projected towards me by those to whom I was subordinate (that is managers both on and off campus at regional and divisional level).

**20)** I’m sure I came to symbolize, like John, a source of discomfort to the corporation as illustrated by the emails I sent to various managers and co-workers, and they may well have bullied me in the hope that I would leave, as a scapegoat taking these unbearable feelings with me.

**21)** I was finally scapegoated and left, though the subsequent pattern of staff attrition on the campus suggests that I was one of several scapegoats rather than the ‘other’ I had originally believed myself to be.

**22)** As ‘the other’ philosophically and ethically at odds with my employers and unable to reach required standards of performance, I became vulnerable to splitting and projection, receiving negative feelings from senior management and projecting them untransformed both onto coworkers and back to those who supervised me. I believe this burden of unbearable feelings intensified my adverse reaction to work-based stress and drove me from the campus. In this respect, my resignation was not entirely voluntary. I left, scapegoated, carrying my negative feelings with me.

**23)** I think I may see if using Excel to tabulate and sort helps at all. I need to start by looking for evidence of othering and scapegoating plus any other obviously recurring themes.

**24)** It occurs to me that instances of scapegoating will be hard to separate and identify in the data, if I am trying to prove that they are the result of a process of splitting and projecting. I may have to look for something more general/less precise such as “apportioning blame”.

25) Given my concerns regarding othering and scapegoating, there are surprisingly few occurrences of either, relative to the other categories. This could be attributable to my selection of data sets of course, and the proportionately large amount of data in the email and interview sets.

26) It's starting to look less and less about me being othered... The major issues seem to be around institutional pressure and lack of control. I wonder how one exacerbates the other. If you feel you can't control things – like attrition – do you opt out, leading to more pressure being applied to perform? What about the steady application of pressure creating a sense of lack of control? I should explore that. Being othered appears to be my issue, but how does that impact my ability to do my job? At the end of the day we all feel the pressure and the lack of control. There is more evidence of scapegoating than othering – that's if you call apportioning blame scapegoating. They might call it being held accountable.

### **Perceived Lack of Control**

27) However, I knew that I felt physically and emotionally unwell and I also perceived that my major challenge at work was managing something (retention) over which I had limited control.

28) I try hard to transform unbearable feelings rather than project them when I write “*I will be less negative in my responses to policies and initiatives I cannot change or control*” on the back of my ‘Mood Elevator Card’)

29) This pressure on individuals to perform according to various matrices often created tension between co-workers. My indignant emails to the College President and Director of Admissions regarding students we were unable to retain for reasons that appeared beyond our control illustrate this point. When I tell my boss that “*...it is neither reasonable, nor motivating to set seemingly unattainable targets*” my gripe is with the corporation. When I tell the Director of Admissions that “*I am perplexed*” by a student who I consider to be “*a drop waiting to happen*,” I am certainly implying that my colleagues in admissions are responsible for enrolling an unsuitable candidate in order to meet their targets while leaving me with a problem that will hurt my (retention) numbers.

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### **Perception of Unfair Treatment**

**32)** In the resignation letter I did not send, I speak of attrition percentage targets that seem “*unreasonable and demotivating*”. This sense of grievance at being asked to meet impossible targets is reflected in many of the faculty members comments in the narratives. For example Kristin says “.... *we’re talking about strike one, strike two – oh there’s another one!*”(p.66). Her baseball analogy suggests both a randomness in the nature of student departure and an emphasis on measuring performance by using statistics. Indeed the corporation’s method of evaluating admissions representatives was whether or not he/she made his/her ‘run rate’- another baseball term - to determine, instead of number of runs scored per innings, the number of students enrolled per week.

**33)** I took issue, not necessarily with the targets themselves but generally how they were measured with few or no variables being taken into account.

**34)** When I tell my boss that “...*it is neither reasonable, nor motivating to set seemingly unattainable targets*” my gripe is with the corporation.

**35)** Mary, who loses half her salary owing to a policy regarding instructor contact hours, says that she accepts the business reasons for this cut, even though it hurts her financially (p.48). I, on the other hand, reject this decision to the point of describing it to Human Resources as “*insane*”.

**36)** In summary, where I did have issues with industry practices, it was often because they were at odds with my personal philosophy of education rather than actual examples of unethical behavior. This conclusion is reinforced by the realization that I was indeed uncomfortable about the extension of market practices into the world of education while my colleagues accepted the for-profit nature of the business. Their discomfort did not come from the transaction between vendor and purchaser but rather from feeling pressurized into meeting targets that seemed unattainable.

**37)** I speak of sleepless nights and the fear of losing my job due to abnormally high attrition numbers. Faculty members describe a sense of injustice at being evaluated according to student retention rather than competent teaching. Perhaps the most obvious example of a bullying tactic was the ‘Retention Board’ referred to on page 58. This was a whiteboard divided into rows and columns with all the instructors names, the number of students they had in total in their classes and the number that had dropped since the beginning of the quarter. The final row held the attrition percentage. I had resisted using this board my entire time on the campus as it met with such a negative response from the faculty. Indeed, it was turned to the wall behind my desk most of the time and was only brought out and updated if we were expecting a corporate visitor. However, during the latter months of my employment, I was compelled to place this board on the wall in the faculty room, update it daily and march the faculty en masse to scrutinize it weekly. Obviously, those with poor attrition percentages felt embarrassment. The general collective response was an awkward silence.

### **Institutional Pressure**

**38)** There was intense institutional pressure. My narratives offer illustrations of this pressure such as when I claim in my resignation letter that a co-worker has falsified graduate employment data. Possible explanations for this behavior would be to improve her overall placement rates in order to win an award, placate her supervisor or perhaps keep her job. It is obvious from the narratives that I perceive pressure to generate revenue for corporate owners. This pressure is exerted by those in senior management at corporate level upon regional directors who in turn exert pressure on campus heads of department, who then prevail upon non-management staff to “*make their numbers*”, whether it be admissions representatives with enrollment targets or instructors striving to contain student attrition. Of course, the senior managers and the CEO of the company are themselves under duress as they answer to shareholders. This institutionalizes pressure in a way that has no direct equivalent in the public sector.

**39)** I clearly felt pressure on a personal level. My partner noted that the need to produce “*cost you a lot of personal and professional stress*”. My perception was that I was not alone in feeling this way. It is ironic given my level of resentment and resistance that I initially felt elated when I thought I had won a trip to the annual celebration of corporate success. However, it is not really so surprising given that my inability to attain certain targets led to frequent feelings of inadequacy.

**40)** I believed that I had been subjected to duress that was detrimental to my health - as I claimed in my resignation letter. I perceived a connection between being threatened (“*Don’t you dare drop any more this month!*”)

**41)** Those at the highest levels of corporate management no doubt felt pressure from shareholders to return profits and employed the technique, described by Dunning et al.

**42)** This pressure on individuals to perform according to various matrices often created tension between co-workers. My indignant emails to the College President and Director of Admissions regarding students we were unable to retain for reasons that appeared beyond our control illustrate this point. When I tell my boss that “*...it is neither reasonable, nor motivating to set seemingly unattainable targets*”, my gripe is with the corporation. When I tell the Director of Admissions that “*I am perplexed*” by a student who I consider to be



*“ a drop waiting to happen”*, I am certainly implying that my colleagues in admissions are responsible for enrolling an unsuitable candidate in order to meet their targets while leaving me with a problem that will hurt my (retention) numbers.

43) My colleagues accepted the for-profit nature of the business. Their discomfort did not come from the transaction between vendor and purchaser but rather from feeling pressurized into meeting targets that seemed unattainable. It was this pressure that led, in my view, to the concerns I discuss below.

44) The admissions representatives worked under institutional pressure to meet targets, in fear of losing their jobs if they did not make sufficient enrollments. They saw frequent examples of colleagues being fired for underperforming.

45) The admissions representatives worked under institutional pressure to meet targets, in fear of losing their jobs if they did not make sufficient enrollments. They saw frequent examples of colleagues being fired for underperforming.

46) Running reports, calculating percentages and evaluating our performance in accordance with statistical matrices led to perpetual monitoring which in turn, was an effective way of controlling us as it came from the top and permeated the whole organization. My performance was scrutinized and measured in terms of attrition statistics and I, in turn was expected to evaluate my staff and faculty in a similar way. We all received punishment for failure to meet targets, whether they be verbal threats, denial of pay rises or fear of dismissal. I can honestly say that I never personally threatened or abused a subordinate but I did act as a mouthpiece for the corporation when instructed to do so which entailed making announcements at staff meetings about how failure to meet our collective targets would jeopardize teaching assignments (fewer students would lead to the need for fewer classes)

47) Not only did institutional pressure create friction between co-workers, it also prompted employees to make decisions that served the interests of the business before those of the students. An example of this was the overscheduling of the ‘mid term starts’ I describe in my resignation letter. These were students permitted to start classes half way through a term instead of having to wait until the start of the next quarter. They were

expected to take highly intensive classes in order to complete the requisite number of hours per course credit in half the time. This situation in itself was contentious, as few students seemed to succeed in these circumstances. Enrolling them (by corporate mandate) in as many credits as other students would normally take in twice the number of weeks arguably suggested a situation where *“business interests are being placed before those of students”*

48) This discomfort was exacerbated by institutional pressure, systematically applied to staff, and often resulting in practices, which I considered questionable.

49) This pressure on individuals to perform according to various matrices often created tension between co-workers. My indignant emails to the College President and Director of Admissions regarding students we were unable to retain for reasons that appeared beyond our control illustrate this point. When I tell my boss that *“...it is neither reasonable, nor motivating to set seemingly unattainable targets”*, my gripe is with the corporation. When I tell the Director of Admissions that *“I am perplexed”* by a student who I consider to be *“a drop waiting to happen”*, I am certainly implying that my colleagues in admissions are responsible for enrolling an unsuitable candidate in order to meet their targets while leaving me with a problem that will hurt my (retention) numbers.

50) It's starting to look less and less about me being othered... The major issues seem to be around institutional pressure and lack of control. I wonder how one exacerbates the other. If you feel you can't control things – like attrition – do you opt out, leading to more pressure being applied to perform? What about the steady application of pressure creating a sense of lack of control? I should explore that. Being othered appears to be my issue, but how does that impact my ability to do my job? At the end of the day we all feel the pressure and the lack of control. There is more evidence of scapegoating than othering – that's if you call apportioning blame scapegoating. They might call it being held accountable.

51) Why can't a cultural theme be something that isn't approved of or promoted like institutional pressure – which is tolerated I suppose but surely not promoted. Maybe it is actually promoted by those who use it as an effective technique. I'll have to ponder that.

### **Questionable Practices**

**52)** I believe that certain examples of inappropriate behavior that I observed were the result of intense institutional pressure. My narratives offer illustrations of this pressure such as when I claim in my resignation letter that a co-worker has inaccurately reported employment data. Possible explanations for this behavior would be to improve her overall placement rates in order to win an award, placate her supervisor or perhaps keep her job. It is obvious from the narratives that I perceive pressure to generate revenue for corporate owners. This pressure is exerted by those in senior management at corporate level upon regional directors who in turn exert pressure on campus heads of department, who then prevail upon non-management staff to “*make their numbers*”, whether it be admissions representatives with enrollment targets or instructors striving to contain student attrition. Of course, the senior managers and the CEO of the company are themselves under duress as they answer to shareholders. This institutionalizes pressure in a way that has no direct equivalent in the public sector.

**53)** In the resignation letter I did not send, I speak of attrition percentage targets that seem “*unreasonable and demotivating*”. This sense of grievance at being asked to meet impossible targets is reflected in many of the faculty members’ comments in the narratives. For example Kristin says “.... *we’re talking about strike one, strike two – oh there’s another one!*” Her baseball analogy suggests both randomness in the nature of student departure and an emphasis on measuring performance by using statistics. Indeed the corporation’s method of evaluating admissions representatives was whether or not he/she made his/her ‘run rate’ - another baseball term - to determine, instead of number of runs scored per innings, the number of students enrolled per week. Vocational colleges are prohibited by law from paying commission to employees so there was no incentive to engage in deceptive practices. However, those who repeatedly failed to meet expectations - particularly in the admissions department – rarely survived more than a few months in their jobs. We were never surprised to hear that yet another admissions representative had been ‘walked out’ with final paycheck in hand.

**53)** Others would take whichever diploma or degree could be completed soonest without regard for the subject matter, such was the pressure to be ‘educated’. Our admissions department’s brief was to convince students that they needed to buy the product on offer. I

worried that more vulnerable students were being encouraged to buy education out of fear that lack of credentials would leave them in perpetual poverty.

**54)** This pressure on individuals to perform according to various matrices often created tension between co-workers. My indignant emails to the College President and Director of Admissions regarding students we were unable to retain for reasons that appeared beyond our control illustrate this point. When I tell my boss that “...*it is neither reasonable, nor motivating to set seemingly unattainable targets*”, my gripe is with the corporation. When I tell the Director of Admissions that “*I am perplexed*” by a student who I consider to be “*a drop waiting to happen*” I am certainly implying that my colleagues in admissions are responsible for enrolling an unsuitable candidate in order to meet their targets while leaving me with a problem that will hurt my (retention) numbers.

**55)** My autoethnographic data illustrate a tendency towards questionable practices endemic within for-profit education. Even though certain instances were idiosyncratic, for example the supervisor on my second campus who hired her friends (I found no instances of this elsewhere), some of the practices were arguably systematic, originated from the upper echelons of the corporation and affected employees at all levels within the hierarchy. The fact that students arguably suffered as a result of questionable practices was of great concern but not only to me. This is the point at which my sense of being ‘othered’ fades into the background and the societal implications of my autoethnographic study come to the fore. I shared these concerns with co-workers, family members and friends who read and commented on my work. In this respect I am far from being ‘the other’. I am part of a society that finds certain practices within the proprietary industry questionable.

**56)** Removing entrance tests designed to identify students lacking in the skills necessary for college success – a decision made at corporate level – was arguably a cynical move to increase enrollments. Students who under the previous system would have been denied admission were now being accepted. Those of us with experience in education feared for these students and expected them to struggle and, in all likelihood leave, owing tuition both to the school and the Federal Government.

**57)** The admissions representatives worked under institutional pressure to meet targets, in fear of losing their jobs if they did not make sufficient enrollments. They saw frequent examples of colleagues being fired for underperforming. By encouraging students to pay high prices for courses in which they might not succeed and rewarding the profit motive, the school arguably perpetuated practices that were at odds with the educational goal of preparing students for gainful employment.

**58)** For example, I was shocked that the corporate policy governing enrollment permitted the Admissions Department to sit a student in the classroom before confirming that the candidate was actually a high school graduate. The rationale behind this was that the majority of new enrollments tell the truth, meaning that it was better to gamble with having to withdraw the occasional student who lied than to risk losing a greater number of starts. By making candidates wait while high school transcripts were obtained (during which time they could change their minds about wanting to come to our school) we could have lost the potential revenue. To some, this was an acceptable practice given that no rules or laws were broken, provided the student was ejected from the classroom if the transcript did not arrive by a certain deadline. To me it was treating students as if they were customers looking to buy a second-hand car who might take off before the deal was closed if any obstacles were presented.

**59)** For me, Maria was a prime example of a student who had been encouraged to enrol because of financial need and the promise that the way out of poverty was to acquire documented evidence of education. What made me most uncomfortable was the realization that, despite not being responsible for the societal ills that had forced her into this corner, colleagues of mine were arguably responsible for persuading her that enrolling in a degree was a good choice, even though, the likelihood of her leaving with anything other than a large amount of debt was remote.

**60)** I can honestly say that I never personally threatened a subordinate but I did act as a mouthpiece for the corporation when instructed to do so which entailed making announcements at staff meetings about how failure to meet our collective targets would jeopardize teaching assignments (fewer students would lead to the need for fewer classes). In this respect I participated in arguably questionable behaviors and this realization made me profoundly uncomfortable.

**61)** Not only did institutional pressure create friction between co-workers, it also prompted employees to make decisions that served the interests of the business before those of the students. An example of this was the overscheduling of the ‘mid term starts’ I describe in my resignation letter. These were students permitted to start classes half way through a term instead of having to wait until the start of the next quarter. They were expected to take highly intensive classes in order to complete the requisite number of hours per course credit in half the time. This situation in itself was contentious, as few students seemed to succeed in these circumstances. Enrolling them (by corporate mandate) in as many credits as other students would normally take in twice the number of weeks certainly suggested a situation where “*business interests are being placed before those of students*”

**62)** I certainly did identify a number of questionable practices instigated by corporate managers that appeared designed to increase profit, arguably at the expense of student success. I also experienced and observed tactics aimed at encouraging employees to use practices that would increase revenue. With regard to ethical challenges, far from being ‘othered’, many of my colleagues shared my concerns.

**63)** This discomfort was exacerbated by institutional pressure, systematically applied to staff, and often resulting in practices, which I considered unacceptable. I was unable to reconcile my role as Academic Dean on a for-profit campus to my personal and professional values.

**64)** When I tell my boss that “...it is neither reasonable, nor motivating to set seemingly unattainable targets”, my gripe is with the corporation. When I tell the Director of Admissions that “I am perplexed” by a student who I consider to be “a drop waiting to happen”, I am certainly implying that my colleagues in admissions are responsible for enrolling an unsuitable candidate in order to meet their targets while leaving me with a problem that will hurt my (retention) numbers.

## **Appendix F: University of Bath Ethics Form**

*Below is a copy of the University of Bath Ethics Form signed by my former supervisor and submitted to the former Director of Studies of the Department of Education.*

### **University of Bath Department of Education EdD PROGRAMME: ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF PROPOSED RESEARCH**

**To be completed by the student and supervisor(s), and approved by the Director of Studies for the EdD before any data collection takes place.**

#### **Introduction**

1. Name(s) of researcher(s)

**Helen Dunford**

2. Provisional title of your research

**Don't mention the 'R' Word!**

**An Autoethnographic Account of A British Educator's Experiences in the US Private Sector.**

3. Justification of Research

**The purpose of the research is to document and analyse using autoethnographic methods the challenges to myself as researcher in reconciling myself to a challenging working environment that subjected me to a high degree of role conflict, leading to the eventual resignation of my position. The research will situate the researcher's personal autoethnographic account within a wider social and occupational context.**

#### **Consent**

4. Who are the main participants in your research (interviewees, respondents, raconteurs and so forth)?

**The student/researcher is the key participant, but will draw on data arising from other 'participants', including interviews and questionnaires collected from co-workers in a previous workplace. Whilst these colleagues were aware of the purpose of my research at the time, given that the focus of, and research methods to be used for the project have changed radically, it now seems advisable to seek *ex-post facto* consent to use material from the interviews in order to contextualise the autoethnographic data. It is not, however, practical to seek consent to summarize the outcomes of the questionnaires as the researcher no longer has access to former faculty and the questionnaires were anonymous in any case. It is not anticipated that any more than passing/incidental reference to these questionnaires will be made.**

**In addition, and as is usually the case with autoethnographic studies, I will be referring to occupationally related conversations and incidents, and it would be impractical to seek to obtain consent to use these data. I will therefore need to protect the anonymity of those included in the autoethnographic account in order to prevent identification of individuals and the particular workplace. It is highly unlikely that any of these people will be aware of the thesis, particularly as it is to be**

**submitted in the UK, but it may be advisable to place an embargo on the thesis for a short period of time, to ensure greater protection of any sensitive data.**

5. How will you find and contact these participants?

**Please see (4) above. If data are obtained from future participants, I will obtain voluntary informed consent in advance.**

6. How will you obtain consent? From whom?

**Consent will be obtained in writing from individual participants.**

### **Deception**

7. How will you present the purpose of your research? Do you foresee any problems including presenting yourself as the researcher?

**As my research has become autoethnographic, I need to present myself as a researcher only in specific contexts, and do not foresee any problems at this stage.**

8. In what ways might your research cause harm (physical or psychological distress or discomfort) to yourself or others? What will you do to minimise this?

**As mentioned in point 4 above, certain incidents that I feel are pertinent to my autoethnography could reflect negatively on 3<sup>rd</sup> parties with whom I interacted or on my former employer. It is unlikely I could obtain ex-post facto consent to include these incidents. Therefore, I will need to discuss with my supervisor how to protect the identity of these 'unwitting' participants. In some cases, the incidents are relatively trivial and unlikely to cause harm, even if the identity of the participant is discernible. If any of the related events could feasibly cause real harm and/or have legal implications, it may be necessary to omit these data and these issues will be discussed fully with my supervisor and the Director of Studies.**

9. What measures are in place to safeguard the identity of participants and locations?

**Participants were not asked to write their names on their questionnaires. No names of specific colleges/corporations will be mentioned. There are a number of providers of private vocational training in the US so the name of my former employer will not be obvious to readers particularly as I will not mention whereabouts in the US I am living or the study is based. Also, the fact that I anticipate readers to be outside the US will make identification of the location even less likely.**

### **Accuracy**

10. How will you record information faithfully and accurately?

**By keeping both hard and soft copies of data as appropriate and logging data systematically.**

11. At what stages of your research, and in what ways will participants be involved?

**I am the main participant in my autoethnography. Other participants are largely 'incidental' and only count as participants in that they have interacted with me at some stage. These participants are mainly co-workers and occasionally students. No one will actually be named in the account and identifying characteristics will be removed from the write-up.**



12. Have you considered how to share your findings with participants and how to thank them for their participation?

**This may not be appropriate as they are not ‘participants’ in the traditional sense of the word. I will, however, to ask a select few friends and contacts to read and comment on my work in the role of ‘critical friend’.**

**Additional Information**

13. Have you approached any other body or organisation for permission to conduct this research?

**Had I persevered with my original Delphi study, or remained with my previous employer, it would have been necessary, per a new company policy introduced after I had started my research, to seek approval for all research/data collection in the workplace including permission to publish. As I no longer work for this employer and have changed my research design completely, I believe this is no longer viable or necessary.**

14. Will this research be supervised? By whom?

**Yes; by Dr. Jacquelyn Allen-Collinson, Department of Education, University of Bath.**

15. Any other relevant information.

**I feel as though my situation is slightly problematic for the reasons stated above. I wish to avoid at all cost breaching the university code of ethics and/or causing harm unwittingly to any parties with whom I have interacted. It is therefore of paramount importance that, with the help of my supervisor and Director of Studies, sufficient safeguards are put in place to protect the identity of participants, particularly anyone who might be offended by any criticism, or portrayal of them in what might be perceived as a negative light.**

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Student:</b><br><b>Helen Dunford</b>                                 | <b>Signature: Helen Dunford</b><br><b>Date: January 4<sup>th</sup> 2012</b><br> |
| <b>Supervising Member(s) of Staff:</b><br><b>Dr. J. Allen Collinson</b> | <b>Signature(s):</b><br><br><b>Date: 4 January 2012</b>                          |

*A copy of this form to be placed in [1] the student file, and [2] an Ethics Approval File held by the Director of Studies for EdD Research Students. The Director of Studies (EdD) will report annually to the Department's Research Students Committee (white paper business) on ethical issues of particular interest that have been raised during the year.*

## Appendix G: Discussions Regarding the Use of Interview Data

After resigning from my former place of employment with a Delphi study on instructor attitudes towards student retention partly completed, I sent the email below to the six faculty members I had interviewed:

### From Helen - Feedback Please!

January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2013

*Dear All,*

*I don't know if you remember doing an interview for me more than 18 months ago where I asked you questions about student retention. It was part of a study I was doing into instructors' attitudes towards retention in private vocational schools for my Doctorate in Education. Well, as you know, I left [name of school] shortly after and had to make some changes to my doctoral research, as I didn't have access to the original data. I am finally close to submitting my thesis. It turned into an autoethnography describing the experiences of a British educator in for-profit education in the States. The basic premise is that the proprietary sector is neither good nor bad (though I have some misgivings about institutional pressure being applied to faculty and staff in order to meet targets), but it is different from anything I have experienced in Britain, which may account for my never really reconciling myself to some of the practices and policies. Anyway, I summarized your collective comments in the attached document. With an autoethnography, it is important that participants remain anonymous because the focus should be on the author rather than anyone else. The name of the school is not mentioned anywhere (or even what part of the country it is in) and I have no plans currently to publish my thesis here. I don't think any of the comments you make are unfair or damaging in any way to any parties but please let me know if there is anything here that you are uncomfortable with my using. First of all you will have to figure out who you are though because I have changed all your names and the only thing that might give it away is approximate age! My supervisor and the University Ethics Committee will also monitor to make sure that my work cannot harm anyone in anyway.*

*If possible, I would like two things:*

- 1) Your permission to incorporate the attached extracts from your interviews into my thesis.*
- 2) Any comments - however brief - about what I have written. A simple paragraph would work saying that you agree with what you (or any of the others said) or that perhaps you have changed your mind over the past 18 months.*

*Many thanks for your help. I have to say that transcribing your interviews brought back many happy memories of working with you.*

*Helen*

I received responses from four of the six instructors. The remaining two had left the school and my email did not reach them. Instructors' pseudonyms are included but real names have been redacted to protect participant anonymity:

*January 6, 2013*

*Helen,*

*It was very interesting to read how my colleagues answered your questions. It's obvious that most of us agree that we can't do anything about a student dropping because of personal reasons. It's too bad that so much emphasis is put on retention and not quality of education to prepare our students for success in their chosen career.*

*I was happy to see that you had "misgivings about institutional pressure being applied to faculty and staff in order to meet targets". I agree completely!*

*I hope these comments help in your completion of a Doctorate in Education. I know I thoroughly enjoyed working with you.*

*(Cindy)*

*January 6, 2013*

*Hi Helen*

*Sorry for the delayed response. I haven't been home much in the past few days.*

*Your new position sounds fantastic! It definitely sounds lower on the stress ladder than what you had before, and it certainly sounds like something you'll enjoy doing. So congratulations are certainly in order! Well done!*

*Please let me know when you need me to sign off on your paper and I'll be happy to do it. I remember that interview well and it was nice to be able to speak so candidly and frankly.*

*It was great to hear from you, Helen. And congratulations again on your new position!*

*Best regards,*

*(Alex)*

*Hi Helen.*

*I still agree that holding instructors accountable for students dropping out is ludicrous. For the school demographic it was impossible to counter homelessness, incarceration, illness and moving due to financial reasons.*

*Holding the admissions accountable seems more logical. Especially those with experience. They should be able to predict success as the instructors can. I could look at a new group listen for a couple minutes and know who would finish and who I'd be calling to see why not in class. If I could see it why didn't the person doing their paperwork admitting them?*

*Silly way to do business.*

*(Joan)*

*March 18, 2013*

*Helen,*

*After reading the attachment there was one main theme that came to my mind. How unfair that teachers are compromised to be less than their best by distractions that don't lead to outcomes of any significance. I could elaborate, but really that is what it made me feel/think.*

*The new school is working out well and while the workload is still heavy, it is not unfair. The support system here is phenomenal.*

*All the best,*

*(Andrea)*